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NATURE as EDUCATOR in the POETRY of WORDSWORTH: an INTERPRETATION

by

Marlene Lorraine Hayes

A THESIS

SUBMITTED to the FACULTY of GRADUATE STUDIES and RESEARCH

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled NATURE as EDUCATOR in the POETRY of WORDSWORTH: an INTERPRETATION submitted by Marlene Lorraine Hayes in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the field of The History of Education.

Supervisor

Date: August 10, 1973

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present an interpretation of William Wordsworth's concept of the role of Nature as educator in the life of man as revealed through his poetry in the period between 1797 and 1807.

Chapter I--the introductory chapter--includes the justification for the subject of the study, an account of certain limitations involved, and a short outline of the scope of the thesis.

Chapter II of the study is an attempt to clarify Wordsworth's concept of the meaning of "Nature". This takes the form of a discussion of Nature in the physical, observable sense; Nature in a transcendental role influencing all inhabitants of the creation; and finally, those characteristics of man that Wordsworth sees as being generally applicable to "human nature".

Chapter III is a discussion of Wordsworth's view of childhood and the interaction of the child with Nature. Emphasis is on the developmental stages of the child, ranging from infancy through pre-adolescence, and the relationship of each stage with natural surroundings. Also included is a section covering the relative importance of books in Nature's educative process as it applies

to childhood.

Chapter IV treats the period of youth or adolescence as it moves from the confused emotions of puberty with its dramatic propensities to an increasing reflectiveness in its dealings with Nature and with other people. It is at this stage of development that the value of intellectual attainment is acknowledged by Wordsworth as being beneficial to a proper appreciation of one's fellow man as exemplified by the great men of history.

Chapter V is concerned with Wordsworth's concept of maturity. There is a brief discussion of some of the aspects of early maturity that appear to be fairly generalized among human beings, the intention being to show how youthful ideals are challenged by events and mature beliefs formulated on the basis of what is seen and experienced. Following this is an examination of Wordsworth's concept of what is lost in maturity as compared to childhood and adolescence. This is succeeded by a section dealing with Wordsworth's opinion of what is gained in maturity; what replaces the peculiar attributes of the child and the youth to provide the strength and harmony of a fully-developed, mature being. Finally, as a rounding-off of the great human experience, there is reference made to Wordsworth's attitudes regarding old age; its characteristics and its particular relationship to Nature.

Chapter VI--the conclusion--provides a brief overview of the preceding chapters and offers an interpretation of the value of Nature as educator in the proper development of man.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to present an interpretation of William Wordsworth's concept of the role of Nature as an educational force in the life of man, as revealed in his poetry.

It is not difficult to justify such a study. First, it seems that education and the humanities have been somewhat artificially sundered. Education is too often treated as a field apart, concerned largely with the practical aspects of classroom techniques. Theoretical study tends to centre on those people who have devoted their writings to purely pedagogical endeavours. More emphasis should be placed on the fact that true education consists in the introduction of students to thought--and not only to the scientific modes of thought that are presently dominant--but to the intuitive modes of thought that are found in the humanities. Therefore, any study that attempts to re-assert the essential "oneness" of education and the humanities has an intrinsic value.

Furthermore, our attitudes to education cannot ignore the past. What we consider to be a new approach

in the educative process is frequently found somewhere in previous ages. For example, when we talk of educating the "whole" child, we are merely repeating what has been said many times before, and said especially profoundly and beautifully in Wordsworth's greatest poetry. In order to see ourselves in proper perspective, it is necessary to be informed regarding the antecedents of our educational attitudes and theories and to realize to what extent they have been influenced by the men and women in our history. This is particularly true when we consider Wordsworth, whose appreciation and understanding of children has established a precedent for many of the pronouncements made today by child psychologists.

Yet another area where Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature as the educator of man is significant for our age, lies in his rejection of the theory that a dichotomy exists with regard to man and the rest of the earthly creation. Wordsworth believes that man is in his proper context as a part of Nature and teaches the possibility of man living in a happy and stoical harmony with Nature. Such a contention has obvious importance in an era of ecological crisis. What Wordsworth has to offer educators is no idle flight of the poetic imagination, nor is it the preaching of "whatever is, is right"; it is, rather, an argument in favour of adherence to a stoicism that is of real consequence to those who accept the necessity of

man functioning as a cooperative "child of Nature" as opposed to man, the exploitive "master of Nature".

Finally, although Wordsworth is not a "popular" poet at the present time, his philosophy of education is perhaps more valuable than ever before. Undoubtedly, for the superficial reader, Wordsworth will appear to dwell in realms of metaphysical impractibility. He is not a poet to find much sympathy in a science-oriented, ultra-analytical climate of opinion. This is precisely why he is important. He offers a balance to extreme rationalism without sacrificing the mundane realities of existence. Moreover, he offers a philosophy of hope and encouragement that is as beneficial to his modern reader as it was to John Stuart Mill.[1]

There are several significant limitations that have been placed upon the study.

To begin with, it will be noted that the poetry utilized is restricted to what is sometimes called the "great decade" of Wordsworth's achievement--the poetry written between the years 1797 and 1807.

There are two main reasons for this decision. First, the poetry of this period provides the clearest

---

[1]See the Autobiography of John Stuart Mill (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1924), pp. 103-105, for Mill's account of the psychological effects produced on him by a reading of Wordsworth's poetry.

insight into Wordsworth's belief in the vital relationship existing between Nature and man. Second, Wordsworth's expressed views on education underwent change as time passed and by the date of the publication of The Excursion in 1815, incorporate a number of differences that would call for separate treatment.

An explanation must also be made here with regard to the poetry itself. I have at all times attempted to base my conclusions on the poetry as it was written between 1797 and 1807. For example, I have used the 1805 version of The Prelude rather than the revised version published in 1850. Moreover, in the poetry taken from the five volumes of Wordsworth's Poetical Works, I have substituted lines and phrases from the "decade" for those that belong to later revisions. These substitutions are found in Professor De Selincourt's footnotes following each poem and can be readily checked by anyone who cares to compare the early versions with the later, revised lines and phrases. My reason for taking this course of action is certainly not because the quality of the early poetry is superior to the revisions, but because I wish to present Wordsworth's thought as it existed in the years 1797 through 1807 rather than that thought as subjected to his subsequent amendments.

A further limitation that should be pointed out concerns the stages of development referred to in this

study. The age limits delineated for each stage are gross at best, particularly as the individual reaches maturity when it becomes impossible to define accurately the progress of development. Although Wordsworth himself has given us come clues with regard to the ages at which we may expect changing perceptions in childhood and in youth, it would be wrong to be too definitive and prescriptive in this area, for as Wordsworth himself says:

> Who knows the individual hour in which
> His habits were first sown, even as a seed,
> Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say,
> 'This portion of the river of my mind
> Came from yon fountain?'
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 211-15)

Therefore, it is with some apology to Wordsworth that in the interest of clarity such age-grouping has been used in the chapters dealing with childhood and adolescence.

Finally, a word should be said regarding the small amount of reference made to secondary sources in this study. Obviously, a vast amount of research has been done on Wordsworth, including the useful biographies of Harper and Moorman; the philosophical studies by Rader and Stallknecht; the monumental philosophical and psychological tome by Havens; and the tireless and excellent work carried out over many years by De Selincourt and Darbishire.[2] And

---

[2]All of these references are included in the bibliography of this study.

this is to mention but a few of the hundreds of scholars who have examined Wordsworth and his views on every conceivable subject from childhood to aesthetics, politics to platonism. However, to my knowledge, little attention has been devoted to any comprehensive discussion of Wordsworth's view of Nature's role as the educator of man on a lifelong basis. It is common to find the phrases "nature as teacher" and the "education of nature" in critical writings, but there appears to be little interest in the interpretation of Wordsworth's theories from an educational, rather than a literary, point of view. Thus, in this study, heavy reliance is made on the poetry itself.

The secondary sources listed in the bibliography include only those works which have been read either wholly or in part by the writer. However, wherever the reader finds close agreement with an opinion as expressed elsewhere, it is either because the point is generally obvious, or because of a similarity in subjective interpretation. On the whole, the intent has been to present, in as straightforward a way as possible, Wordsworth's view of Nature as the educator of man.

The study will include a discussion of Wordsworth's view of Nature in Her physical and transcendental aspects as well as his view of human nature per se. Following this explanatory section, will be chapters dealing

with the developmental stages of human growth from childhood to old age, demonstrating Wordsworth's comprehension of the interaction of Nature and man and how such interaction is necessary to the proper development of the human individual physically, mentally, and emotionally.

It will be shown that for Wordsworth, man without Nature is as incomplete as Nature without man.

CHAPTER II

NATURE

Before discussing Wordsworth's views on Nature's role as the educator of man at the various developmental stages of human existence, it is important to clarify to a certain extent just what Wordsworth means when he refers to "Nature". Without such an explanatory foundation, it is difficult to understand Wordsworth's interpretation of the developmental stages of human life and the part that Nature plays in guiding each person toward the fulfilment of his destiny.

1. Physical Nature

The most obvious aspect of Nature is Her physical, observable Presence, the empirical reality that Wordsworth refers to as

> Nature's secondary grace,
> That outward illustration which is hers,
> . . . . . .
> The charm more superficial, and yet sweet
> Which from her works finds way, contemplated
> As they hold forth a genuine counterpart
> And softening mirror of the moral world.
>
> (The Prelude xiii, ll. 282-88)

In other words, Nature's physical Presence, while more "superficial" than Her spiritual Presence, is the outer

reality that prepares us for the understanding and acceptance of Her moral role.

It is apparent that Wordsworth had the eye of a naturalist as well as of a poet and that Nature's physical Presence held a thorough fascination for him. At the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Wordsworth Society held in the College Hall, Westminster on May 2nd, 1883 Stopford Brooke, in a paper entitled "On Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes", made this comment with regard to those persons who interpret Wordsworth as merely an aery mystic:

> Nor is this idea of a life in separate things, and of a vast, self-conscious thought, of which the phenomena of Nature are the form, the mere vague sentiment of one who did not observe the processes of Nature. Wordsworth had the eye of a field-geologist . . . and I do not doubt myself that close observation of this kind is behind all the transcendental passages concerning Nature in his poetry. [1]

Whether or not one agrees with this observation that in Wordsworth the physical sense precedes the mystical apprehension of Nature, it is certainly true that Wordsworth has, in his own words, "at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject".

Wordsworth presents the physical aspects of Nature to us in a general sense as an enveloping womb in which all objects exist, and in a specific sense where he focuses on particular creatures and objects.

---

[1] William Knight (ed.), Wordsworthiana (London: MacMillan & Co., 1889), p. 135.

The general physical aspect of Nature is found in a profusion of examples. In "The Ruined Cottage", Wordsworth tells us:

> 'Twas Summer, and the sun was mounted high,
> Along the south the uplands feebly glared
> Through a pale steam, and all the northern downs
> In clearer air ascending shewed far off
> Their surfaces on which the shadows lay
> Of many clouds far as the sight could reach
> Along the horizon's edge, that lay in spots
> Determined and unmoved; with steady beams
> Of clear and pleasant sunshine interposed;
>
> (ll. 1-9)

Wordsworth describes himself in this setting:

> Across a bare wide Common I had toiled
> With languid feet which by the slippery ground
> Were baffled still; and when I stretched myself
> On the brown earth, my limbs from very heat
> Could find no rest, nor my weak arm disperse
> The insect host which gathered round my face
> And joined their murmurs to the tedious noise
> Of seeds of bursting gorse which crackled round.
>
> (ll. 19-26)
>
> (Poetical Works V, pp. 379-99)

The first passage is the "enveloping" aspect of physical Nature. The "uplands" and the "northern downs" are earthly boundaries; the sun above and the clouds lying "in spots/ Determined and unmoved" stretch "far as the sight could reach/ Along the horizon's edge". In the second passage, Nature's physical envelopment is brought into closer touch with the reader. Wordsworth toils "with languid feet" across the slippery Common. As the clouds determine the extent of his vision, so the earth beneath his feet "baffles" his progress. Moreover, his physical

energy is taxed and determined by the "heat" that makes the ground uncomfortable to the touch, the incessant "murmurs" of the horde of insects that plague him and even by the "tedious noise/ Of seeds of bursting gorse which crackled round."

Nature reveals herself through sight, touch, and sound; in this case to induce a state of frustrated weariness in the man.

The same apprehension of Nature's all-encompassing Presence is found in the following lines from "To M.H.":

> Our walk was far among the ancient trees:
> There was no road, nor any woodman's path;
> But a thick umbrage--checking the wild growth
> Of weed and sapling, along soft green turf
> Beneath the branches--of itself had made
> A track, that brought us to a slip of lawn,
> And a small bed of water in the woods.
>
> (ll. 1-7)
>
> (Poetical Works II, p. 118)

Here is Nature in Her most seductive physical Presence, revealing Herself in the beauty of "ancient trees", in the vitality inherent in the "wild growth/ Of weed and sapling", in the gentleness of "soft green turf", and in the quietude of a "small bed of water in the woods". Nature beckons to Wordsworth and Mary to enter into the stillness of Herself via Her natural design which requires "no road, nor any woodman's path" but only a "thick umbrage" provided by natural means.

One more example must suffice to impress the tot-

ality of Nature's embrace via the reality of physical setting. This is found even in that most transcendental of Wordsworth's poems, the famous "Tintern Abbey Lines", where he tells us:

> Five years have past; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters! and again I hear
> These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a sweet inland murmur.--Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> That on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
> The day is come when I again repose
> Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
> These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
> Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
> Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
> Among the woods and copses, nor disturb
> The wild green landscape. Once again I see
> These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
> Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
> Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
> Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
>
> (ll. 1-19)
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 259-63)

On reading this passage, one is struck by its inclusiveness. Wordsworth details his surroundings--the waters, the "steep and lofty cliffs", the "quiet of the sky, and then within this larger mural, the man is placed under the "dark sycamore" viewing at closer hand the "plots of cottage-ground" and "orchard-tufts" which are themselves lost "among the woods and copses" in such a way as not to "disturb/ The wild green landscape." [2]

---

[2]It seems clear that those portions of the natural world which are shaped to some extent by man, are still defined within the larger context of Nature.

If Nature exists in the general, all-encompassing physical sense,[3] She is also important in Her more specific sensuous aspects. Wordsworth has an intense interest in almost every feature of the natural creation and records it with a precise fidelity. Some aspects of physical Nature stand out, for Wordsworth, as being of special significance.

For example, the sky is a frequent topic in his poetry and "A Night-Piece" records Wordsworth's close observation of a night sky and the relationships among moon, stars, and clouds. The first few lines set the tone of the entire poem:

> --The sky is overcast
> With a continuous cloud of texture close,
> Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
> Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
> A dull, contracted circle, yielding light
> So feebly spread that not a shadow falls,
> Chequering the ground--from rock, plant, tree, or tower.
>
> (ll. 1-7)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 208-209)

Wordsworth is intrigued too by the conformation and decoration of trees. He describes in The Prelude vi:

> A single Tree
> There was, no doubt yet standing there, an Ash
> With sinuous trunk, boughs exquisitely wreath'd;
> Up from the ground and almost to the top
> The trunk and master branches everywhere

---

[3]For further examples of Nature's general physical Presence, see (The Prelude i, ll. 465-73); "Michael" in (Poetical Works II, pp. 80-94, ll. 1-13); and "To Joanna" (Poetical Works II, pp. 112-14, ll. 38-50).

> Were green with ivy; and the lightsome twigs
> And outer spray profusely tipp'd with seeds
> That hung in yellow tassels and festoons,
>
> (ll. 90-97)

In the poem "Yew-Trees", we see:

> This solitary Tree! a living thing
> Produced too slowly ever to decay;
> Of form and aspect too magnificent
> To be destroyed. But worthier still of note
> Are those fraternal Four of Borrowdale,
> Joined in one solemn and capacious grove;
> Huge trunks! and each particular trunk a growth
> Of intertwisted fibres serpentine
> Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved;
>
> (ll. 10-18)
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 209-210)

Birds and their ways are always attractive to Wordsworth, and generally speaking his observation in the poetry dealing with birds is memorable less for symbolic value than for precision of recording. Wordsworth tells us about the thrush, the cuckoo, the owl, to mention only a few.[4] For example, the fourth stanza of the poem "The Green Linnet", although couched in poetic language, is primarily a recording of Wordsworth's study of the bird and its relationship to its surroundings:

> Upon yon tuft of hazel trees,
> That twinkle to the gusty breeze,

---

[4]Examples of passages dealing with these birds are to be found in the following: "When, to the attractions of the busy world" (Poetical Works II, pp. 118-23, ll. 18-26); "To the Cuckoo" (Poetical Works II, pp. 207-208, ll. 5-8 & 17-20); and "The Idiot Boy" (Poetical Works II, pp. 67-80, ll. 287-91).

Behold him perched in ecstasies,
Yet seeming still to hover;
There! where the flutter of his wings
Upon his back and body flings
Shadows and sunny glimmerings,
That cover him all over.

(ll. 25-32)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 139-41)

The vivid green bird that tirelessly flits and flutters, sending forth "his little song in gushes" is not merely a symbol of the joys of spring, but one of earth's beautiful and fascinating realities.[5] In the poem "Water Fowl", incorporated in his writings on the Lake District, Wordsworth reaches a peak in the synthesis of naturalistic and poetic observation when he describes the birds as

shaping in mid air
(And sometimes with ambitious wing that soars
High as the level of the mountain-tops)
A circuit ampler than the lake beneath--
Their own domain; but ever, while intent
On tracing and retracing that large round,
Their jubilant activity evolves
Hundreds of curves and circlets, to and fro,
Upward and downward, progress intricate
Yet unperplexed, as if one spirit swayed
Their indefatigable flight. 'Tis done--
Ten times, or more, I fancied it had ceased;

---

[5]Unlike Shelley, Wordsworth does not tend to divorce a bird from its biological existence. Shelley says in "To a Skylark":

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,

but for Wordsworth, a bird, regardless of the effect it may produce in conjunction with the human imagination, is most interesting as a vital, living being. Wordsworth's opening lines in his version of "To a Sky-Lark" are:

Up with me! up with me into the clouds!
For thy song, Lark, is strong;

> But lo! the vanished company again
> Ascending; they approach--I hear their wings,
> Faint, faint at first; and then an eager sound,
> Past in a moment--and as faint again!
> They tempt the sun to sport amid their plumes;
> They tempt the water, or the gleaming ice,
> To show them a fair image; 'tis themselves,
> Their own fair forms, upon the glimmering plain,
> Painted more soft and fair as they descend
> Almost to touch;--then up again aloft,
> Up with a sally and a flash of speed,
> As if they scorned both resting-place and rest!
>
> (ll. 4-27)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 288-89)

Other animals make their appearance in Wordsworth's poetry, often in a general sense, as for example in "Lines Written With a Pencil Upon a Stone in the Wall of the House (an Out-House), on the Island at Grasmere":

> It is a homely Pile, yet to these walls
> The heifer comes in the snow-storm, and here
> The new-dropped lamb finds shelter from the wind.
> And hither does one Poet sometimes row
> His pinnace, a small vagrant barge, up-piled
> With plenteous store of heath and withered fern,
> (A lading which he with his sickle cuts,
> Among the mountains) and beneath this roof
> He makes his summer couch, and here at noon
> Spreads out his limbs, while, yet unshorn, the Sheep,
> Panting beneath the burthen of their wool,
> Lie round him, even as if they were a part
> Of his own Household:
>
> (ll. 14-26)

(Poetical Works IV, p. 198)

In addition to its observation of cattle and sheep, this poem aims for the larger explanatory reality; that is, placing Wordsworth, the animals, the out-building, and the small boat in close communion within the bosom of

Nature. As the sheep are a part of Wordsworth's "own Household", so the total scene is a part of the household of Nature.

At other times, Wordsworth "zeros-in" on particular animals,[6] and his descriptive power is perhaps never more appealingly-accurate than in these lines from "The Kitten and Falling Leaves":

> --But the Kitten, how she starts,
> Crouches, stretches, paws, and darts!
> First at one, and then its fellow,
> Just as light and just as yellow;
> There are many now--now one--
> Now they stop and there are none:
> What intenseness of desire
> In her upward eye of fire!
> With a tiger-leap half-way
> Now she meets the coming prey,
> Lets it go as fast, and then
> Has it in her power again:
>
> (ll. 17-28)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 170-73)

The pleasure that Wordsworth takes in flowers is apparent in his several poems addressed to daisies and celandines. The interesting thing to note, particularly in the poem "To the Small Celandine", is that fanciful overview is shot through with observations of the flower's physical requirements and characteristics. Thus, the flower is "modest, yet withal an Elf/ Bold, and lavish of thyself;" which appears

---

[6]See also, "When, to the attractions of the busy world" (ll. 26-32), for a brief, but rather enchanting (and certainly realistic) description of the behaviour of sheep.

Ere a leaf is on a bush,
In the time before the thrush
Has a thought about its nest,
Thou wilt come with half a call,
Spreading out thy glossy breast
Like a careless Prodigal;
Telling tales about the sun,
When we've little warmth, or none.

(ll. 25-32)

Wordsworth continues:

Thou dost show thy pleasant face
On the moor, and in the wood,
In the lane;--there's not a place,
Howsoever mean it be,
But 'tis good enough for thee.

(ll. 44-48)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 142-44)

Thus, we know that the celandine flourishes in the early spring before other flowers dare to show and that the humble plant grows anywhere and is to be found in endless profusion.

There is nothing in Nature that is too small or insignificant to be left untouched by Wordsworth's poetry,[7] as for example his careful description of a butterfly:

I've watched you now a full half-hour,
Self-poised upon that yellow flower;
And, little Butterfly! indeed
I know not if you sleep or feed.
How motionless!--not frozen seas
More motionless! and then
What joy awaits you, when the breeze
Hath found you out among the trees,
And calls you forth again!

(ll. 1-9)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 22-23)

---

[7]Even in such a fanciful poem as "The Oak and The

One could go on piling-up examples of Wordsworth's keenness and credibility as an observor of the natural world and the beauty with which he invests such observation. However, the examples given demonstrate sufficiently that Nature, for Wordsworth, is meaningful as a sensual, physical fact and that he brings to this facet of his poetry an immediacy that is timeless. L.C.W. Bonacina is correct in his contention that

> throughout Wordsworth we discern in the background tacit acceptance of scientific principle which makes for stability and enhances the value of much deep and passionate expression of feeling. [8]

ii. Transcendental Nature

If, for Wordsworth, Nature is a vastly interesting, physically-observable phenomenon, She is also imbued with transcendental qualities; and it is in the combination of these two characteristics, the physical and the transcendental, that Wordsworth discovers "Nature's self, which is the breath of God" (The Prelude v, l. 222). This is demonstrated by the fact that in most of the poetry in the period under discussion, Wordsworth's description of the physical aspects of Nature is introduced by, followed by, or commingled with, his visionary apprehension of the

---

Broom", Wordsworth misses no opportunity to make an observation about Nature. See (Poetical Works II, pp. 130-34, ll. 95-100).

[8]See Nature, CL, (Nov. 28, 1942), p. 624.

Spirit of Nature.

It will be noted that at times the transcendental quality of Nature is expressed as though physical Nature was "peopled" by a variety of "spirits" or shadowy figures ready to impart moral lessons to humanity. This is particularly true of Wordsworth's account of his own childhood, but I think this can be explained in terms of the fact that to a child, a variety of individual "spirits" appearing at different times and in different places would be far more readily comprehensible than the concept of one spiritual element revealing Herself through all things by a variety of means but still rooted in the mighty "whole" as a single, all-encompassing entity.

Nature's general spiritual Presence is expressed in these lines from The Prelude xi:

> Oh! soul of Nature, excellent and fair,
> That didst rejoice with me, with whom I too
> Rejoiced, through early youth before the winds
> And powerful waters, and in lights and shades
> That march'd and countermarch'd about the hills
> In glorious apparition, now all eye
> And now all ear; but ever with the heart
> Employ'd, and the majestic intellect;
>
> (11. 138-45)

The "soul of Nature" is everywhere; in Her own physical properties and in the senses, the heart, and the intellect of man. Thus, as Nature is all-enveloping in the physical sense, Wordsworth tells us She is also spiritually pervasive in the creation.

Wordsworth's conception of the transcendental

aspect of Nature parallels the physical aspect in specifics as well as in generalities. For example, he tells us:

> It was an April morning: fresh and clear
> The Rivulet, delighting in its strength,
> Ran with a young man's speed; and yet the voice
> Of waters which the winter had supplied
> Was softened down into a vernal tone.
> The spirit of enjoyment and desire,
> And hopes and wishes, from all living things
> Went circling, like a multitude of sounds.
> The budding groves appear'd as if in haste
> To spur the steps of June: as if their shades
> Of *various* green were hindrances that stood
> Between them and their object: yet, meanwhile
> There was such deep contentment in the air
> That every naked ash, and tardy tree
> Yet leafless, seemed as though the countenance
> With which it looked on this delightful day
> Were native to the summer.
>
> (ll. 1-17)
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 111-12)

All living things seem to experience the "deep contentment" that Nature provides in the spring air. The rivulet seems alive, "delighting in its strength", running "with a young man's speed", its sound "softened down into a vernal tone". The trees appear to Wordsworth "as if in haste/ To spur the steps of June". Nature's objects exhibit "the spirit of enjoyment and desire,/ And hopes and wishes" which She imparts.[9]

The poem "A Farewell" (title of 1827) illustrates Wordsworth's belief in the "living" quality, or mystical

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[9]A similar example of such transcendental awareness is found in the sonnet "Brook! whose society the Poet seeks" (Poetical Works III, pp. 35-36).

"knowledge" that Nature invests not only in birds, flowers, and weeds, but even in the inanimate cottage. He says:

> Farewell, thou little Nook of mountain-ground,
> Thou rocky corner in the lowest stair
> Of that magnificent temple which doth bound
> One side of our whole vale with grandeur rare;
> Sweet garden-orchard, eminently fair,
> The loveliest spot that man hath ever found,
> Farewell!--we leave thee to Heaven's peaceful care,
> Thee, and the Cottage which thou dost surround.
>
> (ll. 1-8)

Wordsworth addresses his home as a living being:

> Dear Spot! which we have watched with tender heed,
> Bringing thee chosen plants and blossoms blown
> Among the distant mountains, flower and weed,
> Which thou hast taken to thee as thy own,
> Making all kindness registered and known;
> Thou for our sakes, though Nature's child indeed,
> Fair in thyself and beautiful alone,
> Hast taken gifts which thou dost little need.
>
> (ll. 33-40)

It is as though Wordsworth is placating the Spirit that inhabits Nature's "Nook", for he goes on:

> And O most constant, yet most fickle Place,
> That hast thy wayward moods, as thou dost show
> To them who look not daily on thy face;
> Who, being loved, in love no bounds dost know,
> And say'st, when we forsake thee, "Let them go!"
> Thou easy-hearted Thing, with thy wild race
> Of weeds and flowers, till we return be slow,
> And travel with the year at a soft pace.
>
> (ll. 41-48)

And finally, in the last stanza, Wordsworth promises:

> O happy Garden! whose seclusion deep
> Hath been so friendly to industrious hours;
> And to soft slumbers, that did gently steep
> Our spirits, carrying with them dreams of flowers,
> And wild notes warbled among leafy bowers;
> Two burning months let summer overleap,

> And, coming back with Her who will be ours,
> Into thy bosom we again shall creep.
>
> (ll. 57-64)
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 23-25)

Throughout the poem, cottage and setting pulse with life and are imbued with a spiritual quality that totally transcends the empirical. Moreover, the spiritual quality transcends what could, on the surface, be read as an outburst of sentiment regarding the departure from a well-loved home. The sincerity of conviction regarding Nature's very real spiritual "Presence" is found in the last line when Wordsworth says "into thy bosom we again shall creep." Again, as in the first section of this chapter, there is the affirmation of Nature's inclusiveness, but in this case the inclusiveness is obviously at the metaphysical level as well as the physical. The "bosom" of the particular spot to which Wordsworth refers, which offers physical and emotional sanctuary, is a manifestation of the omnipresent sanctuary of Nature; it is a home within the Home.[10]

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[10]The question arises here as to whether or not Wordsworth would regard a cottage and garden in an urban setting as being invested with the same spiritual Presence of Nature. I think it is apparent, considering his remarks on London, that the "fretful stir" and "fever of the world" would have the effect of blotting-out the very stillness that is essential to the effectiveness of Nature's Presence. Wordsworth refers to his own London residence in The Prelude vii in the following manner:

> And now it pleas'd me my abode to fix
> Single in the wide waste, to have a house

The poem "Nutting" is illustrative of the Spirit of Nature as revealed through specific objects. Wordsworth gives us this description of the despoiled trees:

> the shady nook
> Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
> Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
> Their quiet being:
>
> (ll. 45-48)

The trees are obviously infused with a "Presence" and Wordsworth admonishes:

> move along these shades
> In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
> Touch--for there is a spirit in the woods.
>
> (ll. 54-56)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 211-12)

> It was enough (what matter for a home?)
>
> (ll. 75-77)

For Wordsworth, Nature is undoubtedly potentially available in an urban setting; She is simply overwhelmed by human noise and confusion. As Wordsworth tells us, again in The Prelude vii, he is happiest in "the peace/ Of night" when "the great tide of human life stands still" and he can feel, at least for a little while

> The calmness, beauty, of the spectacle,
> Sky, stillness, moonshine, empty streets, and sounds
> Unfrequent as in desarts;
>
> (ll. 633-35)

See also, the sonnet "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge", (Poetical Works III, p. 38), where London, in its early-morning quietness is "open unto the fields, and to the sky". The City, while its "mighty heart is lying still" is compared favourably with Nature in the country setting and Wordsworth is moved to say, "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!"

Examples of the revelation of the Spirit of Nature through sensual media are prolific[11] and, as will be seen in the following chapters, the recognition of this revelation and adherence to the moral lesson imparted is essential to the proper development of a human being.

Just as, in the physical sense, Nature provides a setting in which she "houses" birds, kittens, and all other creatures, so Wordsworth believes that Nature "cares" for Her creatures in a transcendental sense. Thus, in "Stray Pleasures" Wordsworth can say:

> . . . a rich loving-kindness, redundantly kind,
> Moves all nature to gladness and mirth.
>
> The showers of the spring
> Rouse the birds, and they sing;
> If the wind do but stir for his proper delight,
> Each leaf, that and this, his neighbour will kiss;
> Each wave, one and t'other, speeds after his brother;
> They are happy, for that is their right!
>
> (ll. 29-36)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 160-61)

Nature's "awareness" of a concern for Her creatures is found in the poem "Hart-Leap Well", where Wordsworth describes the scene of the death of the Hart:

> I looked upon the hill both far and near,
> More doleful place did never eye survey;
> It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
> And Nature here were willing to decay.
>
> (ll. 113-16)

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[11] In this regard, see also The Prelude i, (ll. 1-4); The Prelude viii, (ll. 116-19) and "To M.H.", (ll. 11-15).

Wordsworth and the shepherd are in harmony as they conclude, each in his own way, that "this Beast not unobserved by Nature fell" (Poetical Works II, pp. 249-54).[12]

Nature's response to the "unbeliever" in Her supernatural agency is found in the poem "To Joanna". As Wordsworth and Joanna roam amidst the natural scene, the poet's companion notes his rapturous expression:

> Joanna, looking in my eyes, beheld
> That ravishment of mine, and laughed aloud.
>
> (ll. 52-53)

And suddenly:

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[12]This poem is an ideal example of what is often referred to as Wordsworth's pantheism. For instance, the following stanza:

> "The Being, that is in the clouds and air,
> That is in the green leaves among the groves,
> Maintains a deep and reverential care
> For them the quiet creatures whom he loves.
>
> (ll. 165-69)

The "Being" referred to above is clearly God, for in Wordsworth's poetry God (usually referred to by name) is always "he", while Nature is "she". It is true that God and Nature are closely at one, but I see no confusion of roles. I see Wordsworth's position as clearly a theistic one; God is the creator of Nature and communicates with man through Her Presence. If, in the period under discussion, Wordsworth relies more on revelation through Nature than on revelation through God, it is only because his greatest interest at this point in his life lay in the manifestations of Nature, both at the physical and transcendental levels. His fascination with God, particularly in the Christian interpretation, was to come at a later date. For further examples of Wordsworth's theism, see The Prelude viii, (ll. 436-37) and The Prelude x, (ll. 386-89). It is quite obvious from these two brief passages (and there are many others) that Wordsworth sees his "divinities" in hierarchical progression.

> The Rock, like something starting from a sleep,
> Took up the Lady's voice, and laughed again;
> That ancient Woman seated on Helm-crag
> Was ready with her cavern; Hammar-scar,
> And the tall Steep of Silver-how, sent forth
> A noise of laughter; southern Loughrigg heard,
> And Fairfield answered with a mountain tone;
> Helvellyn far into the clear blue sky
> Carried the Lady's voice,--old Skiddaw blew
> His speaking-trumpet;--back out of the clouds
> Of Glaramara southward came the voice;
> And Kirkstone tossed it from his misty head.
>
> (11. 54-65)

The uproar among the mountains imparts a kind of instinctive dread to Wordsworth's companion, who draws closer to him "as if she wished/ To shelter from some object of her fear." For Wordsworth himself, there is an elation in Nature's resounding answer to Joanna's unthinking laughter. Although he pays lip-service to the fact that the commotion may have been a result of his own "dreams and visionary impulses" it is nonetheless quite apparent that in his heart he believes it to be "a work accomplished by the brotherhood/ Of ancient mountains".

Here, as in so many of the transcendental passages, one feels Wordsworth's inner certainty of Nature's deliberate intentions. He, unlike his companion, is not frightened by the "loud uproar in the hills" for he is a believer in the very real power that Nature exerts in Her domain; a believer in the creed that "Nature never did betray/ The heart that loved her".

Wordsworth's temerity in expounding such a creed has caused him to be accused by critics, both past and

present[13], of ignoring or glossing-over those aspects of Nature which appear to be cruel, or at the very least indifferent, both to man and beast. However, a study of the poetry of the period under discussion reveals many examples of Wordsworth's consciousness of the pain and suffering which can arise out of contact with the forces of Nature.

For example, in the "Address to My Infant Daughter" Wordsworth muses on the safety and comfort of his Dora as compared with that of a "child of Nature":

> Hadst thou been of Indian birth,
> Couched on a casual bed of moss and leaves,
> And rudely canopied by leafy boughs,
> Or to the churlish elements exposed
> On the blank plains,--the coldness of the night,
> Or the night's darkness, or its cheerful face
> Of beauty, by the changing moon adorned,
> Would, with imperious admonition, then
> Have scored thine age, and punctually timed
> Thine infant history, on the minds of those
> Who might have wandered with thee.--Mother's love,
> Nor less than mother's love in other breasts,
> Will, among us warm-clad and warmly housed,
> Do for thee what the finger of the heavens
> Doth all too often harshly execute
> For thy unblest coevals, amid wilds
> Where fancy hath small liberty to grace
> The affections, to exalt them or refine;
> And the maternal sympathy itself,
> Though strong, is, in the main, a joyless tie
> Of naked instinct, wound about the heart.
>
> (11. 18-38)
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 174-76)

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[13]See William Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1910), pp. 252-256 and Benjamin P. Kurtz, The Pursuit of Death (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 71-73.

Thus, it is apparent that Wordsworth is well aware of the harshness that Nature can inflict on Her inhabitants where climate and living conditions are not so pleasant as those found in his own English Lake District.[14]

Again, in "The Complaint", Wordsworth tells of the impending death of the sick Indian woman and sees no sign of a kindly intervention forthcoming on Nature's part:

> --My fire is dead, and snowy white
> The water which beside it stood:
> The wolf has come to me to-night,
> And he has stolen away my food.
>
> (ll. 55-58)

Yet there is, throughout the poem, a stoic acceptance on the part of the woman that her suffering is in the nature of things. Her sorrow is for the parting with her child rather than a cry against the pain and fear of death. She says only:

> My fire is dead: it knew no pain;
> Yet is it dead, and I remain:
> All stiff with ice the ashes lie;
> And they are dead, and I will die.
> When I was well, I wished to live,
> For clothes, for warmth, for food, and fire;
> But they to me no joy can give,
> No pleasure now, and no desire.
> Then here contented will I lie!
> Alone, I cannot fear to die.
>
> (ll. 11-20)
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 40-42)

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[14]This is in direct opposition to the comments made by Aldous Huxley in his "Wordsworth in the Tropics", Collected Essays (London: Chatto And Windus, 1960), pp. 1-10.

If Wordsworth acknowledges that Nature does not necessarily rush to the rescue of people unfortunate enough to live in harsh surroundings, he finds examples of the same detachment closer to home. In "Lucy Gray", a child dies in a winter storm, and in "Ruth", a woman spends her final years wandering aimlessly about the countryside with little to comfort her. It is interesting to note how Wordsworth treats the tragic elements of these stories as they pertain to Nature. Both Lucy Gray and Ruth were solitary children, raised in the lap of Nature and both might be seen as having been "betrayed" by Her. Yet Wordsworth says of Lucy Gray that

> . . . some maintain that to this day
> She is a living child;
> That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
> Upon the lonesome wild.
>
> (ll. 61-64)

(Poetical Works I, pp. 234-36)

Death, like birth, might be readily seen in this case as "but a sleep and a forgetting". Lucy's mortal existence is swallowed-up in the larger embrace of Nature--she "sings" and "whistles" and, notably, "never looks behind".

Ruth, unlike Lucy Gray, grows to womanhood only to be betrayed by her own innocence[15] but despite her ensuing degradation, imprisonment, and madness, Wordsworth says:

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[15]Similarly, Luke, the young son in "Michael", despite his nurturing amid the beauties and serenities of Nature is not armoured against the vice of city life.

Yet sometimes milder hours she knew,
Nor wanted sun, nor rain, nor dew,
Nor pastimes of the May;
--They all were with her in her cell;
And a wild brook with cheerful knell
Did o'er the pebbles play.

(11. 199-204)

When Ruth escapes from prison she returns to Nature where "among the fields she breathed again" and Wordsworth tells us:

The engines of her pain, the tools
That shaped her sorrow, rocks and pools,
And airs that gently stir
The vernal leaves--she loved them still;
Nor ever taxed them with the ill
Which had been done to her.

(11. 217-22)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 227-35)

It is significant that the objects of Nature are at once "the engines of her pain" and the source of Ruth's solace; pain, as well as pleasure, is admitted as part of the natural scheme.

It is also true that Nature can aid and abet undesirable qualities when She comes in contact with certain types of humans. One instance is the treacherous young man in "Ruth". Wordsworth attempts to explain the effect of Nature on the man:

The wind, the tempest roaring high,
The tumult of a tropic sky,
Might well be dangerous food
For him, a Youth to whom was given
So much of earth--so much of heaven,
And such impetuous blood.

(11. 121-26)

And further:

> Whatever in those climes he found
> Irregular in sight or sound
> Did to his mind impart
> A kindred impulse, seemed allied
> To his own powers, and justified
> The workings of his heart.
>
> (ll. 127-32)

Another example of such a phenomenon is found in "Peter Bell", where Wordsworth tells us:

> "Though Nature could not touch his heart
> By lovely forms, and silent weather,
> And tender sounds, yet you might see
> At once that Peter Bell and she
> Had often been together.
>
> (ll. 286-90)

Moreover:

> "A savage wildness round him hung
> As of a dweller out of doors;
> In his whole figure and his mien
> A savage character was seen
> Of mountains and of dreary moors.
>
> (ll. 291-95)

> "To all the unshaped half-human thoughts
> Which solitary Nature feeds
> 'Mid summer storms or winter's ice,
> Had Peter joined whatever vice
> The cruel city breeds.
>
> (ll. 296-300)

Wordsworth describes this "child of Nature":

> "There was a hardness in his cheek,
> There was a hardness in his eye,
> As if the man had fixed his face,
> In many a solitary place,
> Against the wind and open sky!"
>
> (ll. 316-20)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 331-82)

Peter Bell's ultimate redemption has nothing to do with Nature for She seems powerless to produce a softening effect on his personality; indeed, She makes possible the very reverse.

The poem "A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags" (Poetical Works II, pp. 115-17), offers an interesting comment on Nature's "indifference". Wordsworth, Dorothy and Coleridge come upon a man so wasted by illness that he is unable to work in the harvest fields for winter provisions, but must fish in order "to gain/ A pittance from the dead unfeeling lake/ That knew not of his wants." From such experience, says Wordsworth, "the happy idleness of that sweet morn,/ With all its lovely images, was changed/ To serious musing and to self-reproach." There are two things operative here. First, the comment that Nature is not in tune with the suffering of the man; but perhaps even more important to Wordsworth is the neglect of suffering by other human beings. The moral that permeates the poem is not that Nature, through the "dead unfeeling lake",is somehow to blame for the man's affliction but that human beings are guilty of a quick propensity to judge others rather than to offer assistance. Thus, Nature can do no more than act in alliance with the people who inhabit Her.

If people suffer in Nature, so do other creatures, and although Wordsworth believes in Nature's generally

benevolent intent, particularly toward the young and helpless, he is well aware of the real physical hazards that beset the weak, as in "The Pet-Lamb", where he has the child address the lamb thus:

> "Alas, the mountain-tops that look so green and fair!
> I've heard of fearful winds and darkness that come there;
> The little brooks that seem all pastime and all play,
> When they are angry, roar like lions for their prey.
>
> (ll. 53-56)

(Poetical Works I, pp. 245-46)

And in the poem "The Redbreast and the Butterfly", Wordsworth is perplexed by the fact that the Robin, so "pious" and so loved by man, must pursue so relentlessly the harmless and beautiful butterfly:

> What ailed thee, Robin, that thou couldst pursue
> A beautiful creature,
> That is gentle by nature?
> Beneath the summer sky
> From flower to flower let him fly;
> 'Tis all that he wishes to do.
>
> (ll. 24-29)

Wordsworth's rather fanciful admonition to the Robin is:

> If thou would'st be happy in thy nest,
> O pious Bird! whom man loves best,
> Love him, or leave him alone!
>
> (ll. 37-39)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 149-50)

Regardless of their innocence, lambs and butterflies are not exempt from the toll Nature exacts and Wordsworth is well aware of this fact even though he would prefer it to be otherwise.

In a paper read to the Wordsworth Society in July, 1884, the Honourable Roden Noel said:

> In her general aspects, Nature, if we do not peer too closely into the minutiae of her painful strife and struggle, looks inevitable and calm, not in perpetual spiritual conflict like ourselves; and hence she seems to offer *rest* to those who love her.[16]

It may well be contended that Wordsworth does not "peer too closely" at those things in Nature that are painful to behold, but it is equally true that there is another element in his attitude on this subject. This is revealed in "The Brothers", where the clergyman describes natural disasters:

> For accidents and changes . . .
> Why, we have store of them!--a waterspout
> Will bring down half a mountain;
> . . . . . .
> . . . a sharp May-storm
> Will come with loads of January snow,
> And in one night send twenty score of sheep
> To feed the ravens; or a shepherd dies
> By some untoward death among the rocks:
> The ice breaks up and sweeps away a bridge;
> A wood is felled!
>
> (ll. 146-57)

Later, he says:

> The thought of death sits easy on the man
> Who has been born and dies among the mountains.
>
> (ll. 182-83)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 1-13)

It is in these last two lines that I think we find the particular stoic philosophy that is Wordsworth's; not a

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[16] Wordsworthiana, p. 183

philosophy incapable of feeling or grief, or of recognizing the suffering of the innocent, but one shaped by the experiences of life into acceptance of the good with the bad--pleasure with pain.

iii. The Nature of Man

If Wordsworth has a concept of the "nature of Nature", he also has a concept of "human nature"; those qualities he sees as being inherent in the human creature, especially that endowment called "imagination" which, with the right development and the right circumstances attending it, allows man to enjoy the ultimate communion with Nature. Therefore, an understanding of Wordsworth's view of the nature of man is vital to this study.

Probably the most striking aspect of this view is Wordsworth's esteem of the individual. In the following lines from The Prelude iii, he says:

> Points have we all of us within our souls,
> Where all stand single;
>
> (ll. 186-87)

Further, "each man is a memory to himself" and finally:

> . . . there's not a man
> That lives who hath not had his godlike hours,
> And knows not what majestic sway we have,
> As natural beings in the strength of nature.
>
> (ll. 191-94)

Wordsworth is saying that each man is at some point a unique being; a point where he has a personal pride that gives his life its own peculiar meaning. An individual's

memories of his own thoughts, dreams, and deeds, make him special within the great social framework, and although Wordsworth believes in the essential unity of man, it is also true that he sees these points of uniqueness as conferring a sense of private stature that lets us know our "godlike hours". So, according to Wordsworth, "the Godhead which is ours/ Can never utterly be charm'd or still'd" (The Prelude x, ll. 171-72).

Wordsworth is particularly impressed by the nobility of spirit in the face of suffering of men and women of the humblest origins.[17] Three instances are found in the stories of "Michael", "Ruth", and "The Sailor's Mother", where each person involved represents a different reaction to the circumstances of suffering that life has inflicted. For the old shepherd, Michael, there is a true "silent suffering". The strength of his love allows him to keep living physically but his mental state, which negates any meaning in his life, is symbolized by the neglect of the Sheep-fold in that "many and many a day he thither went,/ And never lifted up a single stone." In "Ruth", we find an example of the forsaken human who retreats from her pain by living physically and emotionally in the realms of her childhood. At the beginning of the poem, Ruth, "not

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[17]Note that in Wordsworth's tribute to Lord Clifford in the "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle", concentration is centred on the simple life that teaches Lord Clifford the qualities of natural dignity and nobility (Poetical Works II, pp. 254-59).

seven years old" is "a slighted child" who wanders "over dale and hill,/ In thoughtless freedom, bold." She is described as "an infant of the woods". By the end of the poem, Ruth's suffering has run full circle. Betrayed and desolate, she returns to wander in the woods of her childhood where she had once found peace of a kind. In "The Sailor's Mother" (Poetical Works II, pp. 54-55), we see yet a different reaction to suffering. The woman who has lost her son at sea is described by Wordsworth as having "such strength, a dignity so fair" that despite her loss, her suffering, and her poverty, she can still find a meaning in her life--that meaning existing in her need to care for the "little Singing-bird" that had meant so much to her son.

The three examples cited above are a reflection of the stoicism that is typically Wordsworthian; a curiously optimistic stoicism that is strikingly in tune with the attitude expressed by the twentieth century psychotherapist Viktor Frankl, who says:

> When a man finds that it is his destiny to suffer, he will have to accept his suffering as his task; his single and unique task. He will have to acknowledge the fact that even in suffering he is unique and alone in the universe. No one can relieve him of his suffering or suffer in his place. His unique opportunity lies in the way in which he bears his burden. [18]

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[18] Man's Search for Meaning (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 78. In connection with the above discussion regarding the nobility that can attend suffering, it is interesting to note that while Wordsworth recognizes the

There is also, in Wordsworth, a recognition of the unique importance of individuals who are often pitied, ignored, or even laughed at, in the general conditions of society. For instance, Wordsworth's "Idiot Boy" is neither an object of fun nor is he treated with a pitying condescension. The boy is an indispensable part of his environment like all others; his inability to communicate normally is irrelevant, what matters is his simplicity, gentleness, and the inner mystery of his "being". Much the same is true of Benjamin in "The Waggoner" (Poetical Works II, pp. 176-2[illegible].[19] Here is a character with quite

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difference in the quality of response to suffering, he tends to regard all three of the examples given as a beautiful tribute to the human spirit. Frankl, although demonstrating certain obvious affinities with Wordsworth, would be likely to categorize the people in the three poems as follows:

1. Michael is an example of the man who is doomed because he has lost his faith in his own future and no longer has a concept of what life expects from him;
2. Ruth typifies the individual who, in order to anaesthetize the pain of present existence, regresses to the past so completely that her future life has no more meaning for her;
3. The life of the sailor's mother has meaning simply because she has a consciousness of a responsibility that is, at least for the moment, ongoing.

Thus, I think it can be seen that although Wordsworth demonstrates, through description, the difference in his characters, he is altogether "romantic" in the inference he draws and individual differences become poetically indistinguishable.

[19]This charming poem, so dear to Charles Lamb, should be read in its entirety for two reasons. The first, to demolish the charge made by many of Wordsworth's detractors regarding his lack of real affection for characters like Benjamin; the second, to demonstrate Wordsworth's under-rated sense of humour. See further reference to "The Waggoner" in Chapter V.

a different weakness--too much fondness for liquor. But if Benjamin's folly loses him his employment, it does not, for a moment, affect the quality about the waggoner that is important to Wordsworth--his compassion, which is reflected both in the handling of his horses and in the good-natured way in which he takes the wandering family aboard. Benjamin's very loss of his job becomes a personal triumph, for the team of horses will work for nobody else and the district loses a part of its tradition and colour that can never be replaced.

That Wordsworth believes not only in the uniqueness "where all stand single", but also in the essential unity of man is demonstrated in this optimistic assertion from The Prelude x, where he tells us that there is:

> One Nature as there is one Sun in heaven,
> That objects, even as they are great, thereby
> Do come within the reach of humblest eyes,
> That Man was only weak through his mistrust
> And want of hope, where evidence divine
> Proclaim'd to him that hope should be most sure,
> That, with desires heroic and firm sense,
> A Spirit thoroughly faithful to itself,
> Unquenchable, unsleeping, undismay'd,
> Was as an instinct among Men, a stream
> That gather'd up each petty straggling rill
> And vein of water, glad to be roll'd on
> In safe obedience, that a mind whose rest
> Was where it ought to be, in self-restraint,
> In circumspection and simplicity,
> Fell rarely in entire discomfiture
> Below its aim, or met with from without
> A treachery that defeated it or foil'd.
>
> (ll. 141-58)

This basic belief in the oneness of "instinct among Men" is presented in a lighter vein in the poem "Who fancied

what a pretty sight". Here, Wordsworth comes upon a rock which has been decorated "with living snow-drops", and in his delight he speculates as to who could have been responsible for such appealing whimsey. Perhaps a child, or a young maid; a mature man or woman, or an old man "toying with his age". For after all, says Wordsworth, such a charming act might be performed by any human being of any age group simply because:

> It is the Spirit of Paradise,
> That prompts such work, a Spirit strong,
> That gives to all the self-same bent
> Where life is wise and innocent.
>
> (ll. 15-18)
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 148-49)

However, if human nature at all stages is capable of actions prompted by this "self-same bent", it must be noted that the reference is to a setting "where life is wise and innocent",--in other words, to people living in simple, rustic surroundings.[20]

Despite such basic optimism, Wordsworth is not blind to the fact that human beings are subject to folly and corruption.[21] In The Prelude xii, Wordsworth decries

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[20]Wordsworth has often been criticized for his intensely rustic bias, but it must be remembered that the happy circumstances of his own childhood in a rural setting, his proud and independent character that made him fiercely loyal to his country origins, and his dislike of the artificial and superficial, would naturally determine his moral interpretation in favour of the country as opposed to what he saw in the city.

[21]This is true even with regard to the country,

the forces that tend to disrupt the unity of mankind:

> Society has parted man from man,
> Neglectful of the universal heart.
>
> (ll. 218-19)

And he speaks of individual perversity:

> . . . all that silent language which so oft
> In conversation betwixt man and man
> Blots from the human countenance all trace
> Of beauty and of love.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 472-75)

Circumstances can alter the basic goodness in the nature of man. For example, as mentioned previously, Wordsworth views life in the city as being disruptive of proper emotional development.[22] In "To Joanna", Wordsworth compares the city-dweller with the country-reared person:

> Amid the smoke of cities did you pass
> Your time of early youth; and there you learned,
> From years of quiet industry, to love
> The living Beings by your own fire-side,

---

although to a lesser degree. Note that in The Prelude viii, Wordsworth's remarks venerating the shepherd include the fact that the shepherds must in truth have been men

> With the most common; Husband, Father; learn'd,
> Could teach, admonish, suffer'd with the rest
> From vice and folly, wretchedness and fear;
>
> (ll. 424-26)

However, he admits, "of this I little saw, car'd less for it" (l. 427).

[22]Wordsworth always indicates surprise that Coleridge, despite his London upbringing, was able to achieve an outlook so similar to his own in many respects. See (The Prelude ii, ll. 466-69) and (The Prelude viii, ll. 603-610). Remember also that part of Peter Bell's viciousness comes of his wanderings in "the cruel city".

> With such a strong devotion, that your heart
> Is slow towards the sympathies of them
> Who look upon the hills with tenderness,
> And make dear friendships with the streams and
> groves.
>
> (ll. 1-8)

In other words, city-dwelling breeds a kind of in-turning towards one's own family or at least towards one's own species to the detriment of all else. It is a circumscribed view of life to Wordsworth, and he goes on to say:

> Yet we, who are transgressors in this kind,
> Dwelling retired in our simplicity
> Among the woods and fields, we love you well,
> Joanna!
>
> (ll. 9-12)

Wordsworth, not unlike Schweitzer, suggests that those who have the capacity to expand their love to include the totality of things, have also a greater understanding for, and love of, their fellow humans. The admonishment is gentle, but potent. Joanna, with her narrowed affections, is unable to comprehend or sympathize with Nature or with those people who enjoy the larger vision. On the other hand, says Wordsworth, those people who, like himself, have been reared in the countryside have a wider-ranging capacity for love--love that includes their fellow beings within the great "whole" of Nature. Indeed, he says, such people show greater tolerance where personality differences exist.[23] Whatever degree of truth one can attach to such

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[23]It can readily be argued here, that capacity for love has as much to do with individual predilection and training as with place of birth. Many a country-reared

observation, Wordsworth believes that love does not "easily thrive/ In cities, where the human heart is sick" (The Prelude xii, ll. 201-202).

There are other circumstances which alter man's nature for the worse. For example:

> . . . where oppression worse than death
> Salutes the Being at his birth, where grace
> Of culture hath been utterly unknown,
> And labour in excess and poverty
> From day to day pre-occupy the ground
> Of the affections, and to Nature's self
> Oppose a deeper nature, there indeed,
> Love cannot be;
>
> (The Prelude xii, ll. 194-201)

Thus, oppression, lack of the "grace/ Of culture", excess labour, and poverty are not glossed-over by Wordsworth. He recognizes that such tribulations can so weigh down the human spirit that the bounties which Nature would bestow on man are swamped by a "deeper nature" of futility and despair that renders man unable to love and leaves him in the grip of depression or evil.

By far the most significant human trait is that link that allows man to interact with the physical and transcendental aspects of Nature; that elusive quality which Wordsworth calls "imagination". Imagination can be defined as that special inheritance of the human mind that enables the individual to perceive the totality of exis-

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person would be as narrow in outlook as Joanna, while many a city-reared person (Coleridge, for example), would be in sympathy with Wordsworth's "larger vision".

tence, to "see into the life of things". It is imagination or the imaginative power that works in conjunction with Nature to achieve a comprehension of the highest "reality".

The development of the imagination is a process that begins in the infant and should, ideally, become fully developed in the adult. The pattern that this development takes is outlined here and will be demonstrated in greater detail in the following chapters.

Starting with the infant, Wordsworth says:

> his mind,
> Even as an agent of the one great mind,
> Creates, creator and receiver both,
> Working but in alliance with the works
> Which it beholds.

(The Prelude ii, ll. 271-75)

This interaction, occurring between Nature and man from the moment of birth, intensifies throughout life. As the child roams at will in Nature, Wordsworth tells us:

> Even then the common haunts of the green earth,
> With the ordinary human interests
> Which they embosom, all without regard
> As both may seem, are fastening on the heart
> Insensibly, each with the other's help,
> So that we love, not knowing that we love,
> And feel, not knowing whence our feeling comes.

(The Prelude viii, ll. 166-72)

As time passes, there is a growing consciousness of the correspondence between Nature and man. Wordsworth tells of himself as a youth on vacation from Cambridge walking along a road at night:

> Thus did I steal along that silent road,
> My body from the stillness drinking in

A restoration like the calm of sleep
But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,
Around me, all was peace and solitude,
I look'd not round, nor did the solitude
Speak to my eye; but it was heard and felt.
O happy state! what beauteous pictures now
Rose in harmonious imagery--they rose
As from some distant region of my soul
And came along like dreams; yet such as left
Obscurely mingled with their passing forms
A consciousness of animal delight,
A self-possession felt in every pause
And every gentle movement of my frame.

(The Prelude iv, ll. 385-99)

Still later, Wordsworth tells of his experience when he and Robert Jones travel through the Simplon Pass:

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
The stationary blasts of water-falls,
And every where along the hollow rent
Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfetter'd clouds, and region of the Heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

(The Prelude vi, ll. 556-72)

In other words, the human mind is gifted with the capacity to receive sense impressions from the world about it, to act upon them in turn and thus, from the melding of the two, to perceive the great "reality".

There are several important passages relating to the "absolute" stage of imagination. For example, in the

"Tintern Abbey Lines", where Wordsworth describes

> that blessed mood
> In which the burden of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,--
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.
>
> (ll. 37-49)

Here, of course, Wordsworth is talking about the complete imaginative experience as it is achieved in adulthood through proper training by Nature. In the midst of Nature's physical "Self", there is a total suspension of sensual reality;[24] the spirit is freed from the physical man and becomes one with the great Soul or Spirit of Nature. This trance-like state, in which physical reality seems to recede entirely, paradoxically brings man into

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[24]In "Strange fits of passion have I known" Wordsworth again sinks into that strange suspension of reality. As he and his horse climb the hill, the moon drops gradually lower on the horizon and Wordsworth observes:

> In one of those sweet dreams I slept,
> Kind Nature's gentlest boon!
> And all the while my eyes I kept
> On the descending moon.
>
> (ll. 17-20)

(Poetical Works II, p. 29)

closer contact with the meaning of physical reality.[25]

Wordsworth attempts to define the imaginative process in several passages of The Prelude. For example, he says in Book vi:

> Imagination! lifting up itself
> Before the eye and progress of my Song
> Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
> In all the might of its endowments, came
> Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
> Halted, without a struggle to break through.
> And now recovering, to my Soul I say
> I recognise thy glory; in such strength
> Of usurpation, in such visitings
> Of awful promise, when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode.
> There harbours whether we be young or old.
> Our destiny, our nature, and our home
> Is with infinitude, and only there;
> With hope it is, hope that can never die,
> Effort, and expectation, and desire,
> And something evermore about to be.
>
> (ll. 525-42)

And near the end of The Prelude, Wordsworth tells us:

> . . . Imagination, which, in truth,
> Is but another name for absolute strength
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And reason in her most exalted mood.
>
> (xiii, ll. 167-70)

It might fairly be said that for Wordsworth, the human imagination is that power linking man with Nature in order that existence and experience are unified and understood at the very core.

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[25]In his description of the climb with Robert Jones to the top of Mount Snowden, Wordsworth gives full expression to the mystical union of Nature and man. See (The Prelude xiii, ll. 40-119).

iv. Summary

To summarize briefly, it can be seen that in Wordsworth's poetry "Nature" is an all-encompassing entity -- a Presence. She might even be described as a Goddess[26] created by God to contain and to care for all the various creatures of the creation.

Nature, unlike God, has a physical, observable reality and provides a setting wherein all creatures, including man, act out their appointed roles. Moreover, She is inherent within all things.

Nature is also a transcendental reality, imparting through Her physical Self those teachings which are acceptable to God; in other words, She is a transmitter of the Divine plan. This is so, despite the existence of suffering and evil. For Wordsworth, the fact of pain in this life is like the fact of pleasure; he accepts it as a necessary part of existence. Suffering is, to a degree, unavoidable but man can alleviate or at least render meaning to suffering if he will give himself over to a state of "wise passiveness" wherein he is finally able to comprehend

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[26] In his essay "Wordsworth and the Iron Time", Lionel Trilling describes Nature as

> . . . a great object, which is from God and might be said to represent Him as a sort of surrogate, a divine object to which one can be in an intimate passionate relationship . . . .

See G.T. Dunklin (ed.), Wordsworth: Centenary Studies Presented at Cornell and Princeton Universities (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1963), p. 139.

Nature's basically benevolent intent. However, Nature cannot dictate the course a life will take; She can only provide the possibilities from which choices are made.

Man is one of the creatures placed within the womb of Nature in order to fulfil a Divine requirement. Among the qualities that Wordsworth sees as being general to human nature is individuality, or the uniqueness that makes each person a special being. Wordsworth believes also in the unity of man, the "universal heart" wherein is found the capacity for understanding and compassion for one's fellows. If man does not fulfil his proper task, if he is swayed by corruption, it may be due not so much to wilful perversity or wickedness than to circumstance, or because he has misinterpreted or turned his eyes away from the teachings of Nature, thus losing contact with Her. Above all, there is man's imaginative faculty which, if properly developed[27], will allow him to experience the high-point of earthly existence--a total communion with Nature.

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[27]Nature seems powerless to comfort where imagination is lacking. In "The Reverie of Poor Susan", the girl has been forced to leave her country home to seek work in the city. When she hears the song of a caged thrush it conjures-up memories of the pastoral setting she loved, but only briefly:

> She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade,
> The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:
> The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
> And the colours have all passed away from her eyes!

(Poetical Works II, p. 217)

CHAPTER III

CHILDHOOD

This chapter will deal with Wordsworth's view of Nature's influence on the development of the child from infancy to pre-adolescence--that is, from birth until about the age of ten.[1] Included in the discussion will be some reference to the value of books in the educative process; not a complete look at Wordsworth's attitude toward books by any means, but only at that part of it which is essential to this study because of its vision of an intimate interaction of Nature with certain reading material in the proper education of the young.

1. Infancy

Infancy is not examined at any great length by Wordsworth; nevertheless, several very significant points emerge in his poetry with regard to the nature of the infant and its relationship to Nature.

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[1]The age of ten is not a purely arbitrary choice on my part. The reason for the selection of age ten as the end of childhood is that there is a definite indication in Wordsworth's poetry that the child of ten is beginning to move into a reflective stage that is more closely associated with the arrival of adolescence than it is with the state of childhood. In this study, childhood is to be defined as the period when instinct and spontaneity are dominant and reflectiveness not yet fully emergent.

The characteristics of the human infant are apparent in the "Address to My Infant Daughter", in which Wordsworth compares the infant to a star which he terms "thy mate and sister of the sky". The babe's "sinless progress, through a world/ By sorrow darkened and by care disturbed" is likened to the star "through gathered clouds/ Moving untouched in silver purity". And, Wordsworth says, "fair are ye both, and both are free from stain".

The comparison made between the baby and the star in the "Address" is similar to that in "The Kitten and Falling Leaves", where the human infant is likened to another "child of Nature", this time a kitten, and Wordsworth finds them "one" in their joyous innocence. The unthinking, sprightly vivacity of the kitten's performance is reflected in the delighted smiles of the infant, and the watching father is moved to wish that he might share in their "perfect gladsomeness" that is so remote from the cares and griefs that are constant companions to adulthood.

In the "Immortality Ode" (Poetical Works IV, pp. 279-85), Wordsworth speaks of the "Child among his new-born blisses". The infant is viewed as "trailing clouds of glory", and for Wordsworth it is not too much to say that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"

The most obvious point of importance in the above examples is that Wordsworth does not share the belief in the innate depravity of man that was so common to his Age.

Rather than being seen as a creature inherently sinful, the infant is as blameless as a star, as innocent as a kitten. In Wordsworth's view, the infant is to be accorded a kind of reverence befitting a state of unblemished worth as well as an attentive appreciation for its life, which is fresh, new, and enchanting.

Another outstanding characteristic of infancy is its passivity of sensation, which assumes special significance in The Prelude ii. The infant is described as a "torpid life" into which the love of his mother passes "like an awakening breeze", and thus

> Subjected to the discipline of love,
> His organs and recipient faculties
> Are quicken'd, are more vigorous, his mind spreads,
> Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
>
> (11. 251-54)

Here Wordsworth clearly emphasizes the importance of the human mother. It is in "this beloved Presence" that the infant first learns to apprehend "all objects through all intercourse of sense". The infant is passive in that he is physically, mentally, and emotionally dependent on the ministrations of other human beings, but at the same time his very passivity causes him to be a recipient, in a total sense, of the sensations and impressions created by those who care for him. Wordsworth says:

> No outcast he, bewilder'd and depress'd;
> Along his infant veins are interfus'd

> The gravitation and the filial bond
> Of nature, that connect him with the world.
>
> (ll. 261-64)

Thus, via his "mute dialogues" with his mother or other persons, the infant develops the "sensibility" which, according to Wordsworth, is the "Great birthright of our Being".

And what of Nature's role in relation to this stage of human existence? In The Prelude i, Wordsworth says of his own infancy that

> one, the fairest of all Rivers, lov'd
> To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song,
> And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
> That flow'd along my dreams . . .
>
> (ll. 272-76)

The River Derwent, Wordsworth tells us, with its beauteous and ceaseless music acted on him as a babe-in-arms and

> compos'd my thoughts
> To more than infant softness, giving me,
> Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
> A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
> That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.
>
> (ll. 281-85)

In the "Immortality Ode", Nature is referred to as having "something of a Mother's mind" and as a "homely Nurse" to "her Foster-child, her Inmate Man".

Thus, for Wordsworth, Nature's influence is felt from the very beginnings of human life and the characteristics She exhibits in the presence of the infant are those of quiet and calm. Nature "murmurs" and "breathes"

Her way into the human subconscious. The voice of Nature, through the river, flows along the dreams of the infant and the image conveyed is that of Nature as a "Being", infinitely soft and solicitous, gently flooding the awakening senses of Her human creature. Nature's message is clear; She offers a world of profound joy "among the hills and groves", a world that is quite as real as the world of human contacts and activities, and quite as important in the development of the human organism. It is evident that Wordsworth does not employ Nature's role as nurse-instructress as a mere artistic device. Nature's entry into the infant receptacle is both conscious and purposeful. Wordsworth's belief, as stated in The Prelude i, is that we have

> first-born affinities that fit
> Our new existence to existing things,
> And, in our dawn of being, constitute
> The bond of union betwixt life and joy.
>
> (ll. 582-85)

ii. Early Childhood

The period of early childhood--that period spanning the time when the child begins to walk and generally get about on his own, until age five[2]-- is, like infancy, not discussed at any great length by Wordsworth. Never-

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[2]Again, this is not entirely an arbitrary choice on my part, the reason being that in Wordsworth's poetry (notably in The Prelude) the most comprehensive discussion of childhood centres on the active period when the child ranges freely in his surroundings. It seems reasonable that this would not include children under the age of five, who are only beginning to move outside the protection of the home.

theless, as with infancy, there are several aspects of this particular period that are worthy of mention.

The characteristics of the child at this point seem to centre around three areas--simplicity, play, and freedom. These are illustrated in Wordsworth's description of himself in The Prelude i:

> Oh! many a time have I, a five years' Child,
> A naked Boy, in one delightful Rill,
> A little Mill-race sever'd from his stream,
> Made one long bathing of a summer's day,
> Bask'd in the sun, and plunged, and bask'd again
> Alternate all a summer's day, or cours'd
> Over the sandy fields, leaping through groves
> Of yellow grunsel, or when crag and hill,
> The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
> Were bronz'd with a deep radiance, stood alone
> Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
> On Indian Plains, and from my Mother's hut
> Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport,
> A naked Savage, in the thunder shower.
>
> (11. 291-304)

Wordsworth stresses the simplicity of early childhood; the responsiveness to natural surroundings--rivers, woods, and fields--a responsiveness prompted merely by virtue of their existence in the child's environment. The passivity of the infant still exists for the young child in a mental sense, but physically he is on active terms with Nature.

The same river that had murmured softly as it entered the infant's dreams has now become a "Playmate . . . dearly lov'd". The child has entered on a new relationship with Nature; he enjoys it as an animal, totally instinctively and unreflectively. The child's life at this stage revolves around tumultuous play; bathing,

leaping, and generally sporting in his surroundings.

Along with the emphasis on play, goes a developing sense of freedom. The personality, Wordsworth believes, must be allowed to develop as naturally as the body. He makes reference to the fact that his own mother had the good sense to trust in the beneficence of Nature and did not hamper the development of her children by over-watchful eyes, but allowed them a freedom to roam at will and learn from constant intercourse with natural objects.[3]

Nature Herself, at this point, provides the setting--the rocks, trees, and waters--in which the child can exercise his newly-discovered freedom of movement and his delight in uninhibited play.

Yet Nature is more than a setting, for once again, according to Wordsworth, there is something conscious on Her part. For example, in the poem "Three years she grew" Wordsworth has Nature reveal (in Her own words) a plan of development for the child:

> "Myself will to my darling be
> Both law and impulse: and with me
> The Girl, in rock and plain,
> In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
> Shall feel an overseeing power
> To kindle or restrain.
>
> (ll. 7-12)

And further:

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[3]The best example of Wordsworth's observations of his mother's attitude in this regard is found in (The Prelude v, ll. 256-90).

"She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And her's shall be the breathing balm,
And her's the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

(ll. 13-18)

"The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

(ll. 19-24)

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

(ll. 25-30)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 214-16)

For Wordsworth then, Nature has a real function to teach, to impart to the young child an impulse of joy--not a wild expression of ungovernable impulse--but rather, an impulse that has as its complement, a sense of restraint. Nature's plan is to encourage the child's active participation in spontaneous movement and abandoned gaiety, yet at the same time to impart a pervading sense of calm to the child's character. Such interaction with natural objects is seen to have the power to infuse the girl with grace and even with beauty.

In direct contrast to the portrayal of this favoured child raised in the heart of Nature, is the des-

cription Wordsworth gives us in The Prelude vii of the beautiful child he sees in the London playhouse, surrounded by "the wretched and the falsely gay" and who seems to Wordsworth to be a "sort of Alien scatter'd from the clouds". This child, deprived of Nature's influence, is described as being

> Like one of those who walk'd with hair unsinged
> Amid the fiery furnace. He hath since
> Appear'd to me oft-times as if embalm'd
> By Nature; through some special privilege,
> Stopp'd at the growth he had; destined to live,
> To be, to have been, come and go, a Child
> And nothing more, no partner in the years
> That bear us forward to distress and guilt,
> Pain and abasement, beauty in such excess
> Adorn'd him in that miserable place.
>
> (ll. 397-406)

Such a child, says Wordsworth, formed so beautifully by Nature would be better to have died at the peak of his perfection and innocence than to grow farther and farther away from the state of grace in which he existed at that point in time.[4]

iii. Later Childhood

From ages five to ten, the child continues to experience what Wordsworth terms "delight and liberty, the simple creed/ Of Childhood" ("Immortality Ode"). This

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[4]See the story of Mary of Buttermere in(The Prelude vii, ll. 320-59) and Wordsworth's comments comparing the child seen in London with the death of Mary's child (ll. 408-11). It should be remembered, however, that this outburst of preference for death over life is unusual in Wordsworth and should not be misconstrued as typical of his thought.

delight in living is unrestrained in its curiosity; active, aggressive, for the most part unreflective, yet storing the treasury of sense-impressions that will be drawn upon in later years for joy and peace of mind. Wordsworth says of this stage of his own childhood in The Prelude ii, that his passionate love for Nature's external forms as yet "was in its birth, sustain'd, as might befal,/ By nourishment that came unsought". In other words, the glory in unending activity was uppermost; the deeper love for Nature was being instilled without his conscious abetment.

As She had entered as gently as a dream into the infant mind, Nature enters the expanding consciousness of the child by means of those aspects of Herself--colour, change, and challenge--that are likely to appeal to the child.

In the "Immortality Ode", Wordsworth describes childhood by saying that in his natural state of spontaneous joy the child "beholds the light" and is happy with life even though "shades of the prison-house begin to close/ Upon the growing Boy". In other words, an optimistic spontaneity would seem to be characteristic of the child at this stage, despite the impending gloom of moving into adult society. The "Ode" celebrates Wordsworth's notion that the child has an immensity of Soul, is the "best Philosopher" of mankind, and is an "Eye among the blind". Wordsworth terms the child a "Mighty Prophet!

Seer blest!" to whom it is given to have an instinctive knowledge of truths that adults lose sight of and struggle to regain. The child is "glorious in the might/ Of heaven-born freedom" and as an adult, Wordsworth is grateful for "those first affections,/ Those shadowy recollections" of childhood which are the guiding light for the rest of life and which can never be utterly extinguished by all those things that inhibit joy and which we are doomed to encounter with the passing years. It is our ability in moments of calm reflectiveness to return to the Nature-inspired remembrances of childhood that provides us with hours of happiness and solace in maturity.

The simplicity of childhood is ever of interest to Wordsworth and he gives several examples of this quality in relation to this stage of development. In "Anecdote for Fathers" (Poetical Works I, pp. 241-43), Wordsworth demonstrates how the probing, intellectualized questions of an adult can produce a purely fabricated response from the five-year-old, and Wordsworth says:

> O dearest, dearest boy! my heart
> For better lore would seldom yearn,
> Could I but teach the hundredth part
> Of what from thee I learn.
>
> (11. 57-60)

In "Alice Fell" (Poetical Works I, pp. 232-34), the little girl's concern is not for her state of orphaned-poverty; it is centred entirely on the simple and immediate fact that her cloak is ruined. The child manages to be quite

matter-of-fact when questioned about herself, but then, Wordsworth says, "her very heart, her grief grew strong;/ And all was for her tattered cloak!" In "We are Seven" (Poetical Works I, pp. 236-38), Wordsworth is fascinated by the "simple child" of eight years, who remains quite unmoved by the persistence of his adult logic. Although he does his best to convince her that death has altered the number of the members of her family, she calmly reiterates the facts that matter to childhood and patiently insists, '"Nay, we are seven!"'

The carefree quality of childhood is a favourite theme with Wordsworth. For example, in "The Idle Shepherd-Boys" (Poetical Works I, pp. 238-41), responsibility is utterly forgotten as the boys play tunes on "pipes of sycamore" and trim their "rusty hats" with fox tail. So, says Wordsworth, "as happy as the day,/ Those Shepherds wear the time away." In "Rural Architecture" (Poetical Works I, p. 244), Wordsworth tells of "three rosy-cheeked school-boys, the highest not more/ Than the height of a counsellor's bag". The boys climb a tall hill and construct from stone '"a Man on the peak of the crag". Wind destroys the monument, but completely undaunted they climb again and build another. Their infectious and tireless good spirits in the face of their small adversity, inspires Wordsworth to say:

> --Some little I've seen of blind boisterous works
> By Christian disturbers more savage than Turks,

Spirits busy to do and undo:
At remembrance whereof my blood sometimes will flag;
Then, light-hearted Boys, to the top of the crag;
And I'll build up a giant with you.

(11. 19-24)

The priest in "The Brothers", recalls the carefree, adventurous spirits of the boys:

Leonard and James! I warrant, every corner
Among these rocks, and every hollow place
Where foot could come, to one or both of them
Was known as well as to the flowers that grow there.
Like roe-bucks they went bounding o'er the hills;
They played like two young ravens on the crags:

(11. 273-78)

In "Nutting", Wordsworth talks again of the carefree existence characteristic of childhood; from the clothes "more ragged than need was" to the boy's feelings:

A little while I stood,
Breathing with such suppression of the heart
As joy delights in;

(11. 21-23)

Wordsworth compares the boy's delight with

A temper known to those who, after long
And weary expectation, have been blest
With sudden happiness beyond all hope.

(11. 27-29)

The boy experiences the voluptuous joy, the secure joy, that is the special privilege of childhood. This same sense of joy is echoed in the passage on the horse-race in The Prelude x:

In wantonness of heart, a joyous Crew
Of School-boys, hastening to their distant home,
Along the margin of the moonlight Sea,

We beat with thundering hoofs the level Sand.

(ll. 564-67)

One final example of the special carefree quality of childhood is provided in the poem "Beggars" (Poetical Works II, pp. 222-24), where Wordsworth first observes from a distance

> A pair of little Boys at play,
> Chasing a crimson butterfly;
> The taller followed with his hat in hand,
> Wreathed round with yellow flowers the gayest of the land.
>
> (ll. 21-24)

And,

> The other wore a rimless crown
> With leaves of laurel stuck about;
> And they both followed up and down,
> Each whooping with a merry shout,
>
> (ll. 25-28)

When they see the stranger, the boys are "ready with a plaintive whine", but realizing that a cash contribution is not forthcoming,

> . . . in the twinkling of an eye,
> "Come! come!" cried one, and without more ado
> Off to some other play they both together flew!
>
> (ll. 46-48)

The very freedom of movement that the child has begun to experience by the age of five, brings him into increasing contact not only with the beauty and joys of Nature, but also with Her other side--Her elements that are dark, mysterious, and threatening. As Wordsworth says of himself in The Prelude i, "fair seed-time had my soul,

and I grew up/ Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear" (ll. 305-306). Nature has become more than a source of comfort and the provider of joyful activity; She emerges as a "Being" with a stern as well as a soft side, and Her role at this period of the child's life adds a new dimension of active instruction in the art of instilling the necessary awareness of fear both at the physical and emotional levels. Nature's plan, says Wordsworth, is

> To enter early on her tender scheme
> Of teaching comprehension with delight,
> And mingling playful with pathetic thoughts.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 587-89)

Nature's guidance, via the "pleasure and pain" principle, is apparent in The Prelude i, where Wordsworth indicates his belief that the child before the age of ten is beginning to develop, with Nature's help, a moral sense. Wordsworth describes himself as a boy wandering alone at night among the cliffs and hollows with his snares, enjoying the adventure but vaguely experiencing a feeling of alienation--he is somehow "a trouble to the peace" that pervades the natural setting. When he stoops to the act of stealing birds snared by others, he feels more than ever separated from the peace of Nature:

> and, when the deed was done
> I heard among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
> Of undistinguishable motion, steps
> Almost as silent as the turf they trod.
>
> (ll. 328-32)

It is obvious that at this point, Nature is serving as a chastiser as well as friendly guide to the boy.[5]

In the passage where Wordsworth tells of plundering the nests of birds in the crags and the actual physical peril involved, he maintains that while the object of the adventure was mean and inglorious, "yet the end/ Was not ignoble" (ll. 339-41), the reason being that Nature used this opportunity to give him a mystical experience of Her powers. Wordsworth says:

> Oh! when I have hung
> Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
> And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
> But ill sustain'd, and almost, as it seem'd,
> Suspended by the blast which blew amain,
> Shouldering the naked crag; Oh! at that time,
> While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ears! the sky seem'd not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion mov'd the clouds!
>
> (ll. 341-50)

Wordsworth says of these events:

> Ah me! that all
> The terrors, all the early miseries
> Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
> The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd
> Into my mind, should ever have made up
> The calm existence that is mine when I
> Am worthy of myself!
>
> (ll. 355-61)

Again in The Prelude i, on the theme of chastisement, there is the episode where on a summer's evening "led by

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[5]There is a rather interesting moral question here. Nature, it would appear, is chastising the boy on the very human grounds of stealing, rather than on the grounds of his having wantonly killed another of Her creatures.

her", the boy comes upon a small boat someone has left tied to a willow in a cave. Unable to resist this opportunity for adventure, the boy takes the skiff for a ride on the lake. The setting is beautiful; "the moon was up, the Lake was shining clear/ Among the hoary mountains" (ll. 383-84). But, Wordsworth says:

> It was an act of stealth
> And troubled pleasure; not without the voice
> Of mountain-echoes did my Boat move on,
>
> (ll. 388-90)

He sets his course toward the summit of a craggy ridge, but as his craft glides along:

> from behind that craggy Steep, till then
> The bound of the horizon, a huge Cliff,
> As if with voluntary power instinct,
> Uprear'd its head. I struck, and struck again,
> And, growing still in stature, the huge Cliff
> Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
> With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
> Strode after me.
>
> (ll. 405-412)

Frightened, the boy heads for home, but is haunted for many days afterward by what he terms "a dim and undetermin'd sense/ Of unknown modes of being" (ll. 419-20). He has an acute awareness of "huge and mighty Forms" which are not like men, not identifiable, but which "mov'd slowly through my mind/ By day and were the trouble of my dreams." (ll. 425-27)

Thus, the boy is finally conscious of some kind of active participation by Nature in the moulding of his feelings, although not as yet with any reference to his

character. He broods on the fact of Her more threatening and "awful" ministrations revealed to him by the intimation of "huge and mighty Forms". Nature is leading the boy to the development of conscience, and here again it must be stated that Nature's guidance is not to be interpreted merely as an element in the child's own developing perceptions, but as a conscious, independent force interacting with the child's perceptual capabilities.

Wordsworth pays tribute to that Presence which infuses the "whole" of the natural world and which has utilized Nature as the educator of the young:

> Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
> Thou Soul that art the Eternity of Thought!
> That giv'st to forms and images a breath
> And everlasting motion! not in vain,
> By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
> Of Childhood didst Thou intertwine for me
> The passions that build up our human Soul,
> Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
> But with high objects, with enduring things,
> With life and nature, purifying thus
> The elements of feeling and of thought,
> And sanctifying, by such discipline,
> Both pain and fear, until we recognize
> A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
>
> (11. 428-41)

Here then, we have Wordsworth's succinct statement regarding experience and growth; the dichotomy of pleasure and pain, both being necessary in order to achieve a properly balanced character. This balance is pointed-up still later in The Prelude i, when Wordsworth tells of the joy of flying the kite which would "pull at its rein, like an impatient Courser" and then at other times be "suddenly/

Dash'd headlong; and rejected by the storm." (ll. 521-24) Likewise, in the midst of a cheerful game of cards in the snugness of the cottage, the boy has one ear tuned to the splitting ice of Esthwaite, which sends

> Among the meadows and the hills, its long
> And dismal yellings, like the noise of wolves
> When they are howling round the Bothnic Main.
>
> (ll. 568-70)

Or again, in The Prelude viii, the child is not totally unmindful of "danger and distress" and man's suffering among "awful Powers, and Forms". The boy experiences personal perils and is deeply impressed by tales told by adults of

> the tragedies of former times,
> Or hazards and escapes, which in my walks
> I carried with me among crags and woods
> And mountains;
>
> (ll. 217-20)

Thus, the young boy's conception of Nature is gradually emerging. On the one hand, Nature is experienced as a "Being" that provides settings of calm and serenity; and on the other hand, the child is coming into contact with the aspects of Nature that "seize/ The heart with firmer grasp!" (ll. 354-55)

The developmental value of the dual teachings of Nature is well illustrated in Wordsworth's description of the childhood of the pedlar in "The Ruined Cottage". The child, says Wordsworth, had been "born of lowly race/ On Cumbrian hills" and "ere yet of age/ To be a shepherd", he

wandered to and from the lonely mountain school. Wordsworth says of him that

> From that bleak tenement
> He many an evening to his distant home
> In solitude returning saw the hills
> Grow larger in the darkness, all alone
> Beheld the stars come out above his head,
> And travelled through the wood, no comrade near,
> To whom he might confess the things he saw.
>
> (ll. 70-76)

Just what these "things" are, we are not told; we can only assume that they are meant to suggest the "unknown modes of being" that had haunted Wordsworth after his evening excursion with the boat, or the "awful Powers, and Forms" that Wordsworth had "carried" with him in his ramblings. At any rate, Wordsworth says of the pedlar that "so the foundations of his mind were laid/ In such communion, not from terror free." Because of his solitude, the pedlar

> While yet a child, and long before his time
> . . . had perceived the presence and the power
> Of greatness, and deep feelings had impressed
> Great objects on his mind,
>
> (ll. 79-82)

And further,

> Nor did he fail,
> While yet a child, with a child's eagerness,
> Incessantly to turn his ear and eye
> On all things which the rolling seasons brought
> To feed such appetite.
>
> (ll. 94-98)

Here again, Wordsworth stresses the interaction of natural objects with the heart and imagination of the child.

The deepest feelings within the pedlar work in

conjunction with the environment so that impressions are stamped indelibly on his subconscious. Wordsworth says of the boy that:

> He had received
> A precious gift, for as he grew in years
> With these impressions would he still compare
> All his ideal stores, his shapes and forms,
> And being still unsatisfied with aught
> Of dimmer character, he thence attained
> An *active* power to fasten images
> Upon his brain, and on their pictured lines
> Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
> The liveliness of dreams.
>
> (11. 85-94)

The boy is filled with curious yearnings and

> many an hour in caves forlorn
> And in the hollow depth of naked crags
> He sate, and even in their fixed lineaments,
> Or from the power of a peculiar eye,
> Or by creative feeling overborne,
> Or by predominance of thought oppressed,
> Even in their fixed and steady lineaments
> He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,
> Expression ever varying.
>
> (11. 100-108)

Despite his rapidly-expanding consciousness both externally and internally, he is still a child, for Wordsworth tells us:

> In his heart
> Love was not yet, nor the pure joy of love,
> By sound diffused, or by the breathing air,
> Or by the silent looks of happy things,
> Or flowing from the universal face
> Of earth and sky.
>
> (11. 108-113)

However:

> he had felt the power
> Of nature, and already was prepared

> By his intense conceptions to receive
> Deeply the lesson deep of love, which he
> Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
> To feel intensely, cannot but receive.
>
> (11. 113-18)

Nature teaches the growing boy through extrinsic and rather tumultuous means, but works also in more subtle ways. As Wordsworth tells us of his own childhood in The Prelude i:

> . . . other pleasures have been mine, and joys
> Of subtler origin; . . . I have felt,
> Not seldom, even in that tempestuous time,
> Those hallow'd and pure motions of the sense
> Which seem, in their simplicity, to own
> An intellectual charm, . . .
>
> (11. 575-80)

The boy experiences an increasing fellowship with Nature as he moves in autumn mists, in the brightness of a wood at noon, in the calm of a summer night, in the fields and by the waters; and though this is still largely an unreflective, passive acceptance and enjoyment of physical presences, a deeper perception of Nature is increasingly apparent. Even in the midst of the hilarious fellowship of a skating party, "the distant hills/ Into the tumult sent an alien sound/ Of melancholy, not unnoticed," and Wordsworth tells us that:

> Not seldom from the uproar I retired
> Into a silent bay, or sportively
> Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
> To cut across the image of a star
> That gleam'd upon the ice:
>
> (11. 474-78)

At age ten, Wordsworth tells us, he

> held unconscious intercourse
> With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
> A pure organic pleasure from the lines
> Of curling mist, or from the level plain
> Of waters colour'd by the steady clouds.
>
> (11. 589-93)

Nature Herself, says Wordsworth, in the form of the sands of Westmoreland, and the creeks and bays of Cumbria, could attest to this increasing sensibility, for She had been with him on many an early evening when he stood alone beholding the tranquillity of the natural setting, "engrafted in the tenderness of thought". Like the pedlar, Wordsworth is still a child and brings with him "no peculiar sense/ Of quietness or peace", yet Nature works within him:

> Even while mine eye has mov'd o'er three long leagues
> Of shining water, gathering, as it seem'd,
> Through every hair-breadth of that field of light,
> New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers.
>
> (11. 605-608)

Thus, he assures us,

> . . . often in those fits of vulgar joy
> Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits
> Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss
> Which, like a tempest, works along the blood
> And is forgotten; even then I felt
> Gleams like the flashing of a shield; the earth
> And common face of Nature spake to me
> Rememberable things;
>
> (11. 609-616)

These "rememberable things" were sometimes accidental in their happening, and

doom'd to sleep
Until maturer seasons call'd them forth
To impregnate and to elevate the mind.

(11. 622-24)

But although the original "vulgar joy" connected with certain scenes was perishable, the scenes themselves remained "depicted on the brain" and, says Wordsworth:

By the impressive discipline of fear,
By pleasure and repeated happiness,
So frequently repeated, and by force
Of obscure feelings representative
Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes,
So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
Though yet the day was distant, did at length
Become habitually dear, and all
Their hues and forms were by invisible links
Allied to the affections.

(11. 631-40)

Again, in The Prelude v, Wordsworth depicts the state of boyhood before puberty and the effect of Nature's subtler means of communication. Standing alone beneath the trees or by a lake, the boy revels in his unthinking intercourse with Nature. Nature, for Her part, deals with him on a conscious level as well as entering unobtrusively into his subconscious. The boy hoots enthusiastically with the owls, learning their calls and mimicking them, but along with this:

when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mock'd his skill,
Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,

Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv'd
Into the bosom of the steady Lake.

(11. 404-413)

After all the proof he has been given, Wordsworth asks how he could doubt Nature's real and benevolent guidance in his development:

Ye Presences of Nature, in the sky
Or on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And Souls of lonely places! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when Ye employ'd
Such ministry, when Ye through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impress'd upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire, and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear,
Work like a sea?

(11. 490-501)

Although Wordsworth is speaking here about his own childhood, I think it can be said that he believes such development to be equally applicable to other children, providing they are given the opportunity to grow according to Nature's plan.

Wordsworth's pre-adolescent, not unnaturally, tends to base his view of humanity on the lessons he has learned in Nature. Thus, in The Prelude viii, we have Wordsworth as a boy reserving his admiration for those men most closely identified with the natural scene--the shepherds. He recalls in several passages his childhood vision of the shepherd. At one point, while wandering in the hills, he says:

aloft above my head,
Emerging from the silvery vapours, lo!
A Shepherd and his Dog! in open day:
Girt round with mists they stood and look'd about
From that enclosure small, inhabitants
Of an aerial Island floating on,
As seem'd, with that Abode in which they were,
A little pendant area of grey rocks,
By the soft wind breath'd forward.

(ll. 93-101)

These men are seen as leading a life "intent on little but substantial needs,/ Yet beautiful, and beauty that was felt." In other words, hard work and the simplicity of his existence do not blind the shepherd to the beauties of Nature. According to Wordsworth, the rather solitary, rural occupation of the shepherd makes him closely attuned to all things in his environment; he does not fight Nature, he fits with Nature. Wordsworth says of the shepherd:

A rambling Schoolboy, thus
Have I beheld him, without knowing why
Have felt his presence in his own domain,
As of a Lord and Master; or a Power
Or Genius, under Nature, under God,
Presiding;

(ll. 390-95)

The shepherd assumes imposing proportions in every way. Through the mists he becomes physically larger, "in size a giant" and "his Sheep like Greenland Bears". Silhouetted against the hills, the shepherd's form flashes upon the boy "glorified/ By the deep radiance of the setting sun:". In the distance, the shepherd becomes "a solitary object and sublime,/ Above all height!"

The "oneness" of the boy's view of the shepherd and

Nature is indicated in "Michael", where Wordsworth describes

> Shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
> Whom I already loved;--not verily
> For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
> Where was their occupation and abode.
>
> (ll. 23-26)

Further, he says:

> while I was yet a Boy
> Careless of books, yet having felt the power
> Of Nature, by the gentle agency
> Of natural objects, led me on to feel
> For passions that were not my own, and think
> (At random and imperfectly indeed)
> On man, the heart of man, and human life.
>
> (ll. 27-33)

In this way, says Wordsworth in The Prelude viii, was man

> Ennobled outwardly before mine eyes,
> And thus my heart at first was introduc'd
> To an unconscious love and reverence
> Of human Nature;
>
> (ll. 411-14)

an attitude not unlike his unconscious love of, and reverence for, the inanimate objects of Nature. To the boy, the human form becomes "like an index of delight,/ Of grace and honour, power and worthiness." Like the objects of Nature, man is also at this point in the boy's life, little judged in terms of his individual traits. The shepherds' "vice and folly, wretchedness and fear", like the unpleasantness and tragedy in Nature are, to the boy, not a vivid reality.

Wordsworth is grateful that man was first presented to him in the light of Nature as a simple, pure, and noble

creature; indeed, this kind of introduction to one's fellow man is essential in order that the child may develop in an emotionally desirable manner. Wordsworth says, with regard to evil that

> . . . were it otherwise,
> And we found evil fast as we find good
> In our first years, . . .
> How could the innocent heart bear up and live!
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 443-46)

The child cannot bear the burden of the knowledge of evil in his formative years and he must not be weighed down with an intellectual interpretation of human nature, for this involves the deficiency of peering too closely at men. When the child sees men with "untaught eyes", men become "purified" because seen at a distance and in connection with "objects . . . gre and fair". The child will thus tend to identify his fellows with that which is positive, and with this foundation, the child will have

> . . . a sure safeguard and defence
> Against the weight of meanness, selfish cares,
> Coarse manners, vulgar passions, that beat in
> On all sides from the ordinary world
> In which we traffic.
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 453-57)

Furthermore, Wordsworth tells us, without this kind of prepossession

> the soul
> Receives no knowledge that can bring forth good,
> No genuine insight ever comes to her:
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 460-62)

He says that he, himself was

> Happy in this, that I with nature walk'd,
> Not having a too early intercourse
> With the deformities of crowded life,
> And those ensuing laughters and contempts
> Self-pleasing, which if we would wish to think
> With admiration and respect of man
> Will not permit us;,
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 463-69)

For Wordsworth, those people who interpret the "sanctity of Nature given to Man" in childhood as "a shadow, a delusion", are "fed/ By the dead letter, not the spirit of things". He says that for such people

> . . . truth is not a motion or a shape
> Instinct with vital functions, but a Block
> Or waxen Image which yourselves have made,
> And ye adore.
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 428-36)

Hence, in childhood, human nature should be seen in connection with that which is noble and admirable not, it should be noted, in order to deceive the child into believing that men have no faults, but rather that by taking the long-range view of man, the child is brought closer to a "genuine insight" into human nature which, for Wordsworth, is basically good.

iv. The Role of Books in Childhood

On several occasions, Wordsworth points out the importance of the combined power of Nature and books as the ideal educators of the young. Regarding the general status of these two "educators", he says in The Prelude v, that:

> Mighty indeed, supreme must be the power
> Of living Nature, which could thus so long
> Detain me from the best of other thoughts.
> Even in the lisping time of Infancy,
> And later down, in prattling Childhood, even
> While I was travelling back among those days,
> How could I ever play an ingrate's part?
> Once more should I have made those bowers resound,
> And intermingled strains of thankfulness
> With their own thoughtless melodies; at least,
> It might have well beseem'd me to repeat
> Some simply fashion'd tale; to tell again,
> In slender accents of sweet Verse, some tale
> That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now.
>
> (ll. 166-79)

The greatness of Nature's influence is thus proven by virtue of the fact that She could keep the boy so long from expressing a proper appreciation for that other great "educator" of his childhood--literature.

Again, comparing the relative merits of books and Nature in the educational process, Wordsworth says that with respect to books and their authors, it is only fit that he should attest

> Their honours; and should, once for all, pronounce
> Their benediction; speak of them as Powers
> For ever to be hallowed; only less,
> For what we may become, and what we need,
> Than Nature's self, which is the breath of God.
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 218-22)

How Nature and books have together influenced his own life is pointed up in the anecdote Wordsworth relates about himself as a child of eight, viewing the body of a drowned man. Wordsworth tells us that because of his stoical contact with Nature and his familiarity with such stories as those found in the Arabian Nights, he was not

totally unprepared for such an encounter and therefore experienced no horror or revulsion at the sight of the body, for as he says, his

> inner eye had seen
> Such sights before, among the shining streams
> Of Fairy Land, the Forests of Romance:
> Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
> With decoration and ideal grace;
> A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
> Of Grecian Art, and purest Poesy.
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 475-81)

In Wordsworth's view, Nature teaches the child to face reality; yet books of the imaginative variety are an indispensable aid in this enterprise, in that they help to make that reality bearable.[6] For the young child he pleads:

> Oh! give us once again the Wishing-Cap
> Of Fortunatus, and the invisible Coat
> Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,
> And Sabra in the Forest with St. George!
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 364-67)

And Wordsworth wishes this not only for the pleasure that these books bring in themselves, nor only for their importance in making life's realities more endurable, but for a reason which is paramount in Wordsworth's thought, that "the Child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap/ One precious gain, that he forgets himself." (ll. 368-69)

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[6]This fits with Wordsworth's statement regarding the inability of the child to "bear the burden of the knowledge of evil in his formative years". Wordsworth feels that the child would undoubtedly be less able to bear the burden of the unpleasant reality of the sight of a drowned body were it not for the veil of romantic imagination cast over it by fanciful literature.

The losing of preoccupation with "self" is one of literature's great gifts and is also one of Nature's lessons to be absorbed by young and old alike.

When Wordsworth does object to books for children, he appears to be thinking in terms of factual texts. He views the schooling of the children of his time as being both physically and mentally restrictive, and commiserates with the plight of the child who is confined to the classroom while

> . . . old Grandame Earth is grieved to find
> The playthings which her love design'd for him
> Unthought of: in their woodland beds the flowers
> Weep, and the river-sides are all forlorn.
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 346-49)

The books that Wordsworth prizes are those that appealed to his own childhood imagination; for instance, he refers to "a precious treasure. . ./ A little, yellow canvas-cover'd Book,/ A slender abstract of the Arabian Tales;" (The Prelude v, ll. 482-84), the kind of book that makes "our wish our power, our thought a deed,/ An empire, a possession" (ll. 552-53). Such stories, he tells us, are much more than a mere preparation for life, they can serve as a great comfort in times of stress throughout the years:

> . . . in that dubious hour,
> That twilight when we first begin to see
> This dawning earth, to recognise, expect;
> And in the long probation that ensues,
> The time of trial, ere we learn to live
> In reconcilement with our stinted powers,

> To endure this state of meagre vassalage;
> Unwilling to forego, confess, submit,
> Uneasy and unsettled; yoke-fellows
> To custom, mettlesome, and not yet tam'd
> And humbled down, oh! then we feel, we feel,
> We know when we have Friends.
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 536-47)

If it is accepted that books of the imaginative variety are most desirable adjuncts to Nature in the education of the child, it must still be remembered that, for Wordsworth, Nature comes first. On this theme, he tells of himself as a boy, watching the progress of a road and imagining where it might be leading. He says of the road:

> . . . its disappearing line,
> Seen daily afar off, on one bare steep
> Beyond the limits which my feet had trod
> Was like a guide into eternity,
> At least to things unknown and without bound.
>
> (The Prelude xii, ll. 148-52)

All things considered, it is obvious that the children who were products of the fashionable systems of education were far from representing the ideal of childhood as advocated by Wordsworth, who says of such a child:

> Vanity
> That is his soul, there lives he, and there moves;
> It is the soul of every thing he seeks;
> That gone, nothing is left which he can love.
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 354-57)

Wordsworth's attitude toward child prodigies is revealed in no uncertain terms in The Prelude v, where he says, among other things, that a being so produced is "no Child, / But a dwarf Man" who is shrewd with regard to the follies

of the world "yet innocent himself withal/ And can read lectures upon innocence". The child is too morally "perfect", his learning too precocious; his artful speech is "massy and ponderous as a prison door" and moreover, "the path in which he treads/ Is chok'd with grammars". Geography, astronomy, and politics hold no mysteries for him and "he sifts, he weighs;/ Takes nothing upon trust". Finally, says Wordsworth, this much-admired child "must live/ Knowing that he grows wiser every day,/ Or else not live at all". (See ll. 294-345)

Wordsworth then proceeds to compare this paragon with the childhood of himself and his friends:

> A race of real children, not too wise,
> Too learned, or too good; but wanton, fresh,
> And bandied up and down by love and hate,
> Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy;
> Mad at their sports like wither'd leaves in winds;
> Though doing wrong, and suffering, and full oft
> Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight
> Of pain and fear; yet still in happiness
> Not yielding to the happiest upon earth.
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 436-44)

It is easy to see that Wordsworth is reacting strongly against too much formalized instruction for the young and that he prefers the child who is "not too wise,/ Too learned" to the child who "can string you names of districts, cities, towns,/ The whole world over".

There is one rather interesting paradox arising out of Wordsworth's thought on this subject. He pities and almost dislikes the child who is too "good"--"the

wandering Beggars propagate his name,/ Dumb creatures find him tender as a Nun"--yet in Wordsworth's few references to girls, he seems to take an opposite viewpoint. For example, in "To a Butterfly" (Poetical Works I, p. 226), Wordsworth describes himself as a "typical" boy:

> A very hunter did I rush
> Upon the prey:--with leaps and springs
> I followed on from brake to bush;
>
> (11. 14-16)

Dorothy, on the other hand, is described thus:

> But she, God love her! feared to brush
> The dust from off its wings.
>
> (11. 17-18)

Similarly, in "The Sparrow's Nest" (Poetical Works I, p. 227), Dorothy "looked at it as if she feared it;/ Still wishing, dreading to be near it;" and Wordsworth says of her that:

> She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;
> And humble cares, and delicate fears;
> A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
> And love, and thought, and joy.
>
> (11. 17-20)

The same is true of Wordsworth's description of the relationship between the little girl and the lamb in "The Pet-Lamb", leaving one to feel that qualities of gentleness, while not quite appropriate in boys, are natural enough in girls.

Excepting this discrepancy with regard to the characteristics of the sexes, Wordsworth's great concern

for both boys and girls is that it is all too possible to train them to grasp intellectual ideas, neatly compartmentalized, without ever exposing them to those ideas placed in proper perspective--that is, as part of the great totality. Wordsworth is opposed to the kind of atomization described by Alfred North Whitehead when he says of education:

> . . . professional training can only touch one side of education. Its centre of gravity lies in the intellect, and its chief tool is the printed book. The centre of gravity of the other side of training should lie in intuition without an analytical divorce from the total environment. Its object is immediate apprehension with the minimum of eviscerating analysis . . . . What is wanted is an appreciation of the infinite variety of vivid values achieved by an organism in its proper environment. When you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset. [7]

An example of Wordsworth's practical application of his theory of the "education of Nature" is found in a letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to her friend Jane Marshall, dated March 19, 1797. The child "Basil" referred to in the letter was the son of Basil Montagu, a friend of the Wordsworths who, because of a series of personal difficulties, decided to entrust the early stages of the upbringing and education of his son to them. The passage reads:

> You ask to be informed of our system respecting Basil; it is a very simple one, so simple that in this age of systems you will hardly be likely to follow it. We teach him nothing at present but what he learns from

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[7] From Science and the Modern World (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 286.

> the evidence of his senses. He has an insatiable curiosity which we are always careful to satisfy to the best of our ability. It is directed to everything he sees, the sky, the fields, trees, shrubs, corn, the making of tools, carts, &c &c &c. He knows his letters, but we have not attempted any further step in the path of *book learning*. Our grand study has been to make him *happy* . . . . [8]

Thus, Wordsworth obviously put his own theories into practice; as to their success, it is only possible to guess that he must have been pleased with the results, for we find him replying in a similar vein in a letter of about 1804 to an unknown correspondent who had requested advice on the raising and educating of his small daughter. Wordsworth's response stresses that the child is not to be subjected in her infancy to books about "Good Boys and Girls, and bad Boys and Girls, and all that trumpery;"--what is important is that the child shall be placed

> . . . in the way of acquiring without measure or limit such knowledge as will lead her out of herself, such knowledge as is interesting for its own sake; things known because they are interesting, not interesting because they are known; in a word by leaving her at liberty to luxuriate in such feelings and images as will feed her mind in silent pleasure. [9]

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[8]De Selincourt (ed.), The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. I (2nd ed. rev.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 180.

[9]De Selincourt (ed.), The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. II (2nd ed. rev.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 287.

v. Summary

In summation, it would appear that with reference to the state of infancy and very early childhood, Wordsworth regards Nature as a purely gentle force, entering with tenderness into the awakening awareness of another of her new inhabitants. Although the tiny baby's whole world is first centred in his human mother, there is at the same time another "mother's" influence, that of Nature, and She would seem to have a conscious plan for the development of the child.

For its part, the human infant has two notable inherent qualities--those of innocence and passivity of sensation. The child is totally receptive to the ministrations of Nature; Nature in Her turn is seen to have a deliberately beneficent attitude toward the child. It is interesting to realize that in Wordsworth's mind there is an inherent glory about the state of infancy that is comparable to the glory that is inherent in Nature and that man is, therefore, in his infant state more closely allied to the state of Nature than at any other period of life except perhaps extreme old age.[10] It is also notable that Wordsworth's use of comparison between a star and a human

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[10]See Chapter V, where the relationship between Nature and the aged is discussed. In poems like "The Old Cumberland Beggar", man seems to return full circle to blend once more in the kind of perfect harmony with Nature that the infant enjoys.

infant, or a kitten and an infant is not a mere artistic device; the comparison illustrates the relationship between the children of Nature.

If innocence and passivity of sensation are the qualities that the human infant brings to its interaction with Nature, the qualities that the young child offers are those of spontaneity, a wanton delight in living, an enormous curiosity, a peculiar logic, and an amorality only beginning to be tinged by the stirrings of conscience. Nature teaches the growing child via a balance of pleasure and pain; from this balance comes understanding; and with understanding, eventually, the serenity of mind so prized by Wordsworth. Here, Wordsworth seems most keenly poised between eighteenth century sense, and nineteenth century sensibility. It is difficult to imagine Dr. Johnson sympathizing with "a grandeur in the beatings of the heart", yet there is no doubt that an ultimate goal that stresses balance, harmony, and serenity is one that is more in keeping with his sense of discipline and order than it is with the nineteenth century romantic emphasis on happiness as achieved by the breaking-down of restrictions and the exaltation of "passion" over "reason".

Regarding books, it may be said that for Wordsworth, the most important facet of human life, the imagination, so wonderfully emergent in the "natural" child, is stifled by the imposition of conventions. What Wordsworth

wants is not the elimination of all books for children, or even all intellectual training, but the elimination of the type of pedantic instruction which he tells us is falsely called "education" but which only succeeds in destroying one of the most valuable assets of childhood--spontaneity.

"Our simple childhood sits upon a throne/ That hath more power than all the elements", says Wordsworth, (The Prelude v, ll. 532-33) and thus, it is not far-fetched for him to maintain that the "Child is father of the Man" in that the spontaneous delight of childhood, the innocence and the simple exultation in living is to him a kind of "natural piety" that is the special gift of the very young and all too soon lost in the wake of the customs of society.

"Learning by doing" in the lap of Nature, coupled with the sense of joy and loss of preoccupation with "self" that is found in the world of fanciful adventure stories is, for Wordsworth, the proper education of childhood; one which will result in the creation of a child of whom it can be said that:

> From nature largely he receives; nor so
> Is satisfied, but largely gives again,
> For feeling has to him imparted strength,
> And powerful in all sentiments of grief,
> Of exultation, fear, and joy, his mind,
> Even as an agent of the one great mind,
> Creates, creator and receiver both,
> Working but in alliance with the works
> Which it beholds.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 267-75)

CHAPTER IV

YOUTH

Whether or not Wordsworth was fully aware of the vast changes that puberty works on both the physical and emotional processes of the individual we cannot know, but the "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" of his own youth are thoroughly familiar to the modern reader as referring to that period marking the advent of adolescence.

This chapter will consider what Wordsworth has to say about youth--how it moves away from the childish emphasis on sense-impression toward a deeper, albeit more dramatic interpretation of Nature; how the youth is increasingly conscious of his own emotions and glories in moods and transports of feeling, particularly with respect to the natural world; and finally, how intellect and a desire for insight into human nature become of heightened interest and importance.

i. Early Youth

Early youth, or that period ranging from the advent of puberty until about age 16[1], involves far-reaching

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[1]Since the time of sexual maturity varies, we can assume that the "advent of puberty" might be anywhere from age 10 to the early teens. The age of 16 was chosen as an appropriate end of the period of "early youth" because by

changes in the physical and emotional development of the individual personality and a corresponding change in his relationship to Nature. Wordsworth says of this age:

> For now a trouble came into my mind
> From unknown causes. I was left alone,
> Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.
> The props of my affections were remov'd,
> And yet the building stood, as if sustain'd
> By its own spirit! All that I beheld
> Was dear to me, and from this cause it came,
> That now to Nature's finer influxes
> My mind lay open, to that more exact
> And intimate communion which our hearts
> Maintain with the minuter properties
> Of objects which already are belov'd,
> And of those only.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 291-303)

This passage points up the uncertainties of the age. There is a new sense of self-reliance, but it is a slightly uncomfortable self-reliance. The "props" of the youth's affections--the world about him which he could, as a child, cling to with unthinking certainty--no longer serve; yet for all that, the "props" have left him a legacy that in some mysterious way sustains him. As the adolescent looks out at the world, it assumes a new importance to him due to his increasing receptivity to "Nature's finer influxes". The things he loved before are beheld with a new clarity of vision, although as Wordsworth is quick to point out, the deepening emotions felt by the youth are generally limited to those objects he has already known and "those only".

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age 17 many people are at the stage where they are ready for university entrance, and should be considered as entering the period of "late youth".

In other words, his affections are as yet somewhat bounded by familiarity.

A "trouble . . . from unknown causes" has begun to act on him, yet in many ways he is still a child, as is demonstrated in the following passage:

> Many are the joys
> Of youth; but oh! what happiness to live
> When every hour brings palpable access
> Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,
> And sorrow is not there.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 303-307)

Thus far then, Wordsworth seems to be saying that many of the robust joys of late childhood are still avidly enjoyed by the early adolescent. There is, however, a major change, the appearance of "silent inobtrusive sympathies,/ And gentle agitations of the mind". He begins to apprehend

> . . . manifold distinctions, difference
> Perceived in things, where to the common eye,
> No difference is; and hence, from the same source
> Sublimer joy;
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 318-21)

Wordsworth describes the intensity of such feelings at this age:

> I would walk alone,
> In storm and tempest, or in star-light nights
> Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,
> Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
> To breathe an elevated mood, by form
> Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,
> Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 321-29)

What is happening to the adolescent is that imagination is now of increasing significance in his perceptions. Wordsworth describes this phenomenon working in conjunction with puberty:

> A plastic power
> Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
> Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
> A local spirit of its own, at war
> With general tendency, but for the most
> Subservient strictly to the external things
> With which it commun'd.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 381-87)

Therefore, it would seem that the onset of puberty is accompanied by a heightening of the imaginative power. The combination is "devious", causing the youth to feel "rebellious", but despite the restless confusion the change allows the recipient to interact in a new and far more meaningful way with his environment.

With regard to Nature, the youth demonstrates a growing ability to experience Nature not only physically, but psychologically. The adolescent "feels" Nature's power without benefit of "form" or "image". Nature assumes an importance that is as much supernatural as natural and provides an outlet for emotions that are both ecstatic and mystical.

The following passage illustrates the changes taking place in early adolescence:

> We ran a boisterous race; the year span round
> With giddy motion. But the time approach'd
> That brought with it a regular desire
> For calmer pleasures, when the beauteous forms

> Of Nature were collaterally attach'd
> To every scheme of holiday delight,
> And every boyish sport, less grateful else,
> And languidly pursued.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 48-55)

There are two points to be observed here; first, the increasing emphasis on subtlety, started in late childhood and intensifying in early adolescence. The delight in sport is balanced by the "desire/ For calmer pleasures"[2]. Along with this gradual move toward serenity of mind and body, is the beginning of a new love for Nature. Although this love exists partly because Nature is associated with the boy's love of sports and vigorous outdoor activities, She is also loved partly for Herself. She adds a new lustre to pastimes that were once complete within themselves. Wordsworth clearly feels that the early youth is becoming "tuned in" to the loveliness of his surroundings and is rapidly developing a sense of wonder and appreciation that did not exist for the child. That this is so, is demonstrated in several of the passages concerning sports. For example, Wordsworth tells of himself and friends racing their boats on Lake Windermere. The boys, in the course of the race, pass three small islands which are so beautiful in their natural setting that the beauty

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[2]It is interesting to note that a certain passivity that was almost completely superseded by animal activity in early childhood, has crept back into the picture and will continue to become increasingly important until the human being reaches old age when the emotions have run full circle, and passivity again reigns supreme.

does not escape the boys' attention, and in fact transcends the importance of the competition. Wordsworth says:

> In such a race,
> So ended, disappointment could be none,
> Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy:
> We rested in the shade, all pleas'd alike,
> Conquer'd and Conqueror. Thus the pride of strength,
> And the vain-glory of superior skill
> Were interfus'd with objects which subdu'd
> And temper'd them, and gradually produc'd
> A quiet independence of the heart.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 65-73)

The boys have reached the stage where they feel a joy in their environment that is almost equal to the pleasures of competitive activity; boisterous fun is balanced by a new and quieter joy, or as Wordsworth maintains, "temper'd" by an emotion "of the heart".

Wordsworth recalls another incident of his own early youth when, amidst the raucous pleasure of racing horses through the valleys he notes, in spite of the general hilarity, the sweet song of an invisible bird which fills his being with an incredible joy. In thinking of this and similar events, he says:

> Oh! ye Rocks and Streams,
> And that still Spirit of the evening air!
> Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt
> Your presence, when with slacken'd step we breath'd
> Along the sides of the steep hills, or when,
> Lighted by gleams of moonlight from the sea,
> We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 138-44)

Here again, vigorous activity is suffused with an emotion that is a distinct extension of that experienced in the

late stages of childhood--a quieter and warmer awareness of Nature's Presence.

Wordsworth is not wholly preoccupied with his own growth, to the exclusion of his peers. His friends accompany him on at least some of his adventures and seem to share to a degree in his mystical experience, as exemplified in the following passage where, after a day's bowling, Wordsworth and his companions return home and he describes it thus:

> But ere the fall
> Of night, when in our pinnace we return'd
> Over the dusky Lake, and to the beach
> Of some small Island steer'd our course with one,
> The Minstrel of our troop, and left him there,
> And row'd off gently, while he blew his flute
> Alone upon the rock; Oh! then the calm
> And dead still water lay upon my mind
> Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky
> Never before so beautiful, sank down
> Into my heart, and held me like a dream.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 170-80)

It is apparent that in Wordsworth's view the sympathies of other adolescents beside himself are enlarging to the point of conscious awareness of surroundings. The serenity of the water and the beauty of the setting sun cause the rowers to leave the beach "gently" and inspire the young musician to blow his flute "alone upon the rock". Wordsworth says of himself:

> Thus daily were my sympathies enlarged,
> And thus the common range of visible things
> Grew dear to me: already I began
> To love the sun, . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . for this cause, that I had seen him lay

His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
The western mountains touch his setting orb,
. . . . . .
Analogous, the moon to me was dear;
For I would dream away my purposes,
Standing to look upon her while she hung
Midway between the hills,

(The Prelude ii, ll. 181-99)

In short:

. . . Nature, intervenient till this time,
And secondary, now at length was sought
For her own sake.

(The Prelude ii, ll. 206-208)

The changing seasons are more meaningful also, as the boy's observation of Nature comes into sharper focus, a focus of the "most watchful power of love", leaving "a register/ Of permanent relations" (The Prelude ii, ll. 310-12). This attitude is a result both of his own emotional development and of the beauties of his natural surroundings. Wordsworth says:

'Twere long to tell
What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,
And what the summer shade, what day and night,
The evening and the morning, what my dreams
And what my waking thoughts supplied, to nurse
That spirit of religious love in which
I walked with Nature.

(The Prelude ii, ll. 371-77)

He tells us:

And not alone,
In grandeur and in tumult, but no less
In tranquil scenes, that universal power
And fitness in the latent qualities
And essences of things, by which the mind
Is mov'd by feelings of delight, to me
Came strengthen'd with a superadded soul,

A virtue not its own.

(The Prelude ii, ll. 341-48)

Wordsworth tells of taking early-morning walks "before the hours of School":

> . . . five miles
> Of pleasant wandering, happy time! more dear
> For this, that one was by my side, a Friend
> Then passionately lov'd;

(The Prelude ii, ll. 350-53)

Or, he would wander alone before dawn, and says that when

> among the hills I sate
> Alone, upon some jutting eminence
> At the first hour of morning, when the Vale
> Lay quiet in an utter solitude
> . . . . . .
> Oft in those moments such a holy calm
> Did overspread my soul, that I forgot
> That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw
> Appear'd like something in myself, a dream,
> A prospect in my mind.

(The Prelude ii, ll. 361-71)

In the "Tintern Abbey Lines", Wordsworth describes another aspect of the relationship between the early adolescent and Nature. He tells of himself bounding over the mountains and along rivers and streams "like a roe" following "wherever nature led" and says that Nature

> To me was all in all.--I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.

(ll. 75-83)

Nature is a strong physical fact in this passage, but not merely in the sense of serving as a setting. The boy is aware of the Presences of Nature, and thrills to the fact of his existence in the midst of such grandeur. Wordsworth refers to the boy's "love" for the natural setting, a passion quite real and intense, not dependent on contemplation and intellectualization. It is the "love" of the early adolescent, a love that exults in itself but has not yet reached the stage where it can "see into the life of things".

In "The Ruined Cottage", Wordsworth talks about the youth alone in the mountains tending the sheep and the emotions that fill him:

> Oh! then what soul was his when on the tops
> Of the high mountains he beheld the sun
> Rise up and bathe the world in light. He looked,
> The ocean and the earth beneath him lay
> In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched
> And in their silent faces did he read
> Unutterable love. Sound needed none
> Nor any voice of joy: his spirit drank
> The spectacle. Sensation, soul and form
> All melted into him. They swallowed up
> His animal being; in them did he live
> And by them did he live. They were his life.
>
> (ll. 122-33)

Looking back at boyhood as a comparison, it can be seen that Wordsworth feels that in boyhood a reverence for Nature's inherent qualities is secondary to the vigorous pursuits and animal activities made possible by Her. As he says:

> Nature herself was at this unripe time,

But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their trivial pleasures;

(The Prelude viii, ll. 476-79)

In early adolescence, with the gradual falling away of the boy's intense joy in these pleasures and his growing tendency toward a state of reflection, Nature becomes prized "for her own sake" and takes first place in the affections. Nature becomes a passion, a rapture, an "'immediate joy,/ Ever at hand" (The Prelude viii, ll. 487-88).

As for an interest in other human beings, here too early adolescence demonstrates a marked change from childhood. In infancy, adults played an indispensable role in his existence; in childhood, man became an idealized extension of the grandeur in natural objects. In early adolescence, there is a lessening of dependence and idealization. The youth feels a greater emotional closeness to his peer group, but in general there is a lessening in the importance of other human beings in his environment. The youth is much more independent and aloof; he has the desire and the ability to get about and discover the fascinations of the earth, and in comparison to the glories he discovers in Nature, man is "but a grace/ Occasional, an accidental thought,/ His hour being not yet come." (The Prelude viii, ll. 488-90)

As in late childhood, there is still combined

power to be found in Nature and imaginative literature. Wordsworth describes the pedlar as a youth in "The Ruined Cottage", greedily devouring "whate'er the rustic Vicar's shelf supplied":

> The life and death of Martyrs who sustained
> Intolerable pangs, and here and there
> A straggling volume torn and incomplete
> Which left half-told the preternatural tale,
> Romance of giants, chronicle of fiends
> Profuse in garniture of wooden cuts
> Strange and uncouth, dire faces, figures dire,
> Sharp-kneed, sharp-elbowed, and lean-ankled too
> With long and ghostly shanks, forms which once seen
> Could never be forgotten.
>
> (ll. 176-85)

Wordsworth says of these books:

> Things though low
> Though low and humble, not to be despised
> By such as have observed the curious links
> With which the perishable hours of life
> Are bound together, and the world of thought
> Exists and is sustained.
>
> (ll. 185-90)

Thus, as in childhood, such books furnish the imagination with a nourishment "not to be despised" in the development of the individual.

Like Nature, literature is becoming valued for its own sake, and Wordsworth attributes this new appeal to the search for "something loftier, more adorn'd,/ Than is the common aspect, daily garb/ Of human life." (The Prelude v, ll. 599-601). This is indicated in a passage from The Prelude v, when Wordsworth tells of himself and a friend making a practice of strolling the public roads in the mornings "repeating favourite verses with one voice". He

says of this time:

> Thirteen years
> Or haply less, I might have seen, when first
> My ears began to open to the charm
> Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet
> For *their own sakes*, a passion and a power;
>
> (ll. 575-79)

As the youth leaves this early period then, he has experienced changes that occur partly as a result of the physical changes taking place within himself, and partly as a result of the aspects of Nature that She imparts to him at this chosen time. What Nature seems to be teaching at this point is the "quiet independence of the heart" that is so prized by Wordsworth. Nature's own capacity for "stillness" is grafted onto the affections of the growing boy and as a result he seeks for "calmer pleasures". A sense of the joy that is found in "solitary" states of being becomes so strong that Wordsworth is moved to comment that there

> Ensu'd a diffidence and modesty,
> And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,
> The self-sufficing power of solitude.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 76-78)

ii. Later Youth

Later youth, or that stage of life extending from about age 17 to age 21[3], is a period that is of great fas-

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[3]The reason for the selection of age 21 as the end of "late youth" is based on Wordsworth's graduation from Cambridge at this age and his embarkation on a new stage of life, involving more independence. His residence in

cination to Wordsworth, and he discusses several of its aspects at some length, particularly in The Prelude.

Before looking at these aspects, it is necessary to examine Wordsworth's general view of the emotional pattern of later adolescence, with special attention to the somewhat divided feelings with which he regards this stage of development. Wordsworth says of his own adolescence:

> I had a world about me; 'twas my own,
> I made it; for it only liv'd to me,
> And to the God who look'd into my mind.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 142-44)

And further:

> Strange rendezvous my mind was at that time,
> A parti-colour'd show of grave and gay,
> Solid and light, short-sighted and profound,
> Of inconsiderate habits and sedate,
> Consorting in one mansion unreprov'd.
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 346-50)

Late adolescence is a time when the youth does not quite know who or what he is and his emotions and attitudes vacillate from one extreme to another with dizzying rapidity. He combines a "child-like fruitfulness in passing joy" with "steady moods of thoughtfulness, matur'd/ To inspiration" (The Prelude iii, ll. 148-50). In short, he is still partly a child, enjoying his pleasures with thoughtless and spontaneous joy, yet on the other hand, having his moments of thoughtful reflection and mature in-

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London following graduation belongs to "early manhood" rather than to "late youth".

spiration. Wordsworth says:

> I had hopes and peace
> And swellings of the spirits, was rapt and soothed,
> Convers'd with promises, had glimmering views
> How Life pervades the undecaying mind,
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 152-55)

Wordsworth's divided feelings show in the following passage:

> I had made a change
> In climate; and my nature's outward coat
> Changed also, slowly and insensibly.
> To the deep quiet and majestic thoughts
> Of loneliness succeeded empty noise
> And superficial pastimes; now and then
> Forced labour; and, more frequently, forced hopes;
> And, worse than all, a treasonable growth
> Of indecisive judgments that impair'd
> And shook the mind's simplicity.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 207-16)

His "parti-colour'd" mind then, is capable not only of an increasing sensibility to the world around him, but also of becoming involved in superficial pleasures. What seems to be a major negative factor to Wordsworth is the indecisiveness of the age, which he views as having "impair'd" the "mind's simplicity" and thus having destroyed the clarity of vision that he values so much in the child and in the early adolescent. Apparently, the youth in later adolescence, although gaining in ability to feel and to love, has lost the ability to view his world with an objective and diffident eye, and this in turn affects his judgments adversely. Indeed, life at this stage becomes enslaved by indecisiveness, as

> in vague
> And loose indifference, easy likings, aims
> Of a low pitch; duty and zeal dismiss'd,
> Yet nature, or a happy course of things
> Not doing in their stead the needful work.
> The memory languidly revolv'd, the heart
> Repos'd in noontide rest; the inner pulse
> Of contemplation almost fail'd to beat.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 331-38)

Moreover, Wordsworth says

> easily I pass'd
> From the remembrances of better things,
> And slipp'd into the weekday works of youth,
> Unburthen'd, unalarm'd, and unprofan'd.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 242-45)

The tone of disapproval in the above passages is the voice of Wordsworth the adult, speaking of his own youth and its lack of attention to "duty and zeal". Wordsworth does not appear to understand the physical basis for such "vague/ And loose indifference" but, though not quite approving of this element of his youth, he remembers also that

> Caverns there were within my mind, which sun
> Could never penetrate, yet did there not
> Want store of leafy arbours where the light
> Might enter in at will.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 246-49)

In other words, adolescent sloth does not completely obscure the fact that the youth is capable of imbibing the basic values that are important to Wordsworth, who seems to view the youth as an unwilling, but promising receptacle for "a happy course of things".

Wordsworth goes on to describe his own life at this time as:

> Rotted as by a charm, my life became
> A floating island, an amphibious thing,
> Unsound, of spungy texture, yet withal,
> Not wanting a fair face of water-weeds
> And pleasant flowers.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 339-43)

Thus, while he obviously exalts the child's simple, spontaneous logic and frank approach to life, Wordsworth seems to be confused and a little disappointed by some of the qualities that constitute later adolescence. Wordsworth concedes that youth wears a "fair face" and enjoys a new communion with the external world, but at the same time he dislikes the limitations that mark this stage of human life. Its vacillation, semi-inertia, and liking for trivia as well as for profound thoughts and experience are to Wordsworth "unsound" and "spungy", lacking a proper sense of the important values of life. It might be safe to say that, in general, adolescence suffers from the disease that Wordsworth dislikes most in human nature - that of self-centredness.

Nevertheless, if to Wordsworth the adolescent appears to find most of his pleasure in "empty noise/ And superficial pastimes", still, he tells us, "this was a gladsome time". And indeed there is, in late youth, a certain freedom from deep care, a readiness to dispense sympathy and a heart that is open to joy that Wordsworth, for all his philosophical frowns, cannot quite find unattractive.

Joy is one of the specific aspects of late youth

that Wordsworth mentions on several occasions. The youth is "alive" to all things and finds enjoyment wherever he goes and in whatever he does. Wordsworth says of his own life at Cambridge that "my heart/ Was social, and lov'd idleness and joy" (The Prelude iii, ll. 235-36). He tells us further:

> Companionships,
> Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all;
> We saunter'd, play'd, we rioted, we talk'd
> Unprofitable talk at morning hours,
> Drifted about along the streets and walks,
> Read lazily in lazy books, went forth
> To gallop through the country in blind zeal
> Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast
> Of Cam sail'd boisterously; and let the stars
> Come out, perhaps without one quiet thought.
>
> (ll. 249-58)

In The Prelude iv, Wordsworth again relates the joy he experienced in late adolescence. He recalls an episode where he sauntered along a country road "like a river murmuring/ And talking to itself" (ll. 110-11), as he attempted to create poetry. In a moment of success, when delighted by his own poetic imagery, he turned, in a burst of spontaneous and enthusiastic emotion to the dog who was his companion and caressed the animal again and again "with stormy joy". Later in the same Book, he tells of his delight in the gaiety of a dance where he felt

> Slight shocks of young love-liking interspers'd,
> That mounted up like joy into the head,
> And tingled through the veins.
>
> (ll. 325-27)

Thus, for the late adolescent there is joy in poetry, in

people, in animals--in life itself. Moreover, along with this extroverted pleasure in existence there is "a multitude of hours/ Pilfer'd away by . . ./'Good-natured lounging,'" (The Prelude vi, ll. 199-202).

Another characteristic of late adolescence that appears throughout Wordsworth's poetry is the pleasure of melancholy. Wordsworth describes the onset of melancholy:

> . . . when first
> The boyish spirit flagg'd, and day by day
> Along my veins I kindled with the stir,
> The fermentation and the vernal heat
> Of Poesy, affecting private shades
> Like a sick lover,
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 91-96)

Again, he tells of

> A melancholy from humours of the blood
> In part, and partly taken up, that lov'd
> A pensive sky, sad days, and piping winds,
> The twilight more than dawn, Autumn than Spring;
> A treasur'd and luxurious gloom, of choice
> And inclination mainly, and the mere
> Redundancy of youth's contentedness.
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 192-98)

In other words, there is so much joy in the state of late adolescence that melancholy is a pleasant offshoot of "contentedness". Thus, when Wordsworth and his young travelling companion, Robert Jones, land in France and start on their pilgrimage to the Alps, Wordsworth says:

> 'Twas sweet at such a time, with such delights
> On every side, in prime of youthful strength,
> To feed a Poet's tender melancholy
> And fond conceit of sadness, . . .
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 375-78)

He tells of the two of them revelling

> In dreams and fictions pensively compos'd,
> Dejection taken up for pleasure's sake,
> And gilded sympathies;
>
> (ll. 481-83)

Involved in this state of melancholy is an intense sense of dramatization, and Wordsworth describes this fanciful state of mind:

> An auxiliar light
> Came from my mind which on the setting sun
> Bestow'd new splendour, the melodious birds,
> The gentle breezes, fountains that ran on,
> Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obey'd
> A like dominion; and the midnight storm
> Grew darker in the presence of my eye.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 387-93)

Nature also plays Her part:

> . . . Nature and her objects beautified
> These fictions, as in some sort in their turn
> They burnish'd her.
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 523-25)

Wordsworth continues with his description of these amusing if inaccurate propensities:

> From touch of this new power
> Nothing was safe: the Elder-tree that grew
> Beside the well-known Charnel-house had then
> A dismal look; the Yew-tree had its Ghost,
> That took its station there for ornament:
> Then common death was none, common mishap,
> But matter for this humour everywhere,
> The tragic super-tragic, else left short.
>
> (ll. 525-32)

On hearing how a widow visited the grave of a husband, "the fact was caught at greedily" and the youth must embellish the image until

She was a Visitant the whole year through,
Wetting the turf with never-ending tears,
And all the storms of Heaven must beat on her.

(ll. 539-41)

Wordsworth's attitude toward the excessive drama involved in adolescent melancholy is one of a rather ironical, but good-natured humour. In fact melancholy, like joy, can be a particularly positive factor in mental growth. As Wordsworth says in The Prelude vfii, melancholy is a result of:

that first poetic Faculty
Of plain imagination and severe,
No longer a mute Influence of the soul,
An Element of the nature's inner self,

(ll. 511-14)[4]

which is beginning to "have some promptings to put on/ A visible shape, ..."

Another quality of late youth is its ready sympathy as expressed in

. . . those ingenuous moments of our youth,
Ere yet by use we have learn'd to slight the crimes
And sorrows of the world.

(The Prelude vii, ll. 361-63)

The youth is moved with promptness to experience an empathy

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[4]Wordsworth refers to the "first poetic Faculty" here and I think it is correct to interpret this emergence of "plain imagination and severe" as including not only the "poetic Faculty" that is found in the poet per se, but that faculty as it exists in every individual of reasonable intelligence and perception. Wordsworth clarifies his feelings on this subject in his letter to John Wilson, dated June 7, 1802 in The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. I, pp. 352-358.

with the emotions of others, but here again the empathy is tinged by a certain overcast of drama. Wordsworth says of himself in The Prelude vii, that "when, wrought upon by tragic sufferings",

> . . . though I was most passionately moved
> And yielded to the changes of the scene
> With most obsequious feeling, yet all this
> Pass'd not beyond the suburbs of the mind:
>
> (ll. 503-506)

It is not so much that the late adolescent is deceitful in his feelings or expressions of sympathy or grief; it is rather that such emotions tend to be largely a superficial exercise arising out of his own overflow of "contentedness" and that an immersion in sorrow can be experienced as a positive pleasure.

Yet another trait of later adolescence in Wordsworth's eyes is animism, which Wordsworth finds most apparent in his own adolescence at about the age of 17. He tells us that "to unorganic natures I transferr'd/ My own enjoyments" (The Prelude ii, ll. 410-11)[5]. Moreover, he says:

> I felt the sentiment of Being spread
> O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
> O'er all, that, lost beyond the reach of thought
> And human knowledge, to the human eye

---

[5]Wordsworthian animism must not be interpreted in the light of twentieth century psychological bias, where animism is treated with condescension as being appropriate only to small children and primitive tribes. For Wordsworth, the key to the interpretation of his animistic experience lies in his phrase "the great social principle of life", because for him, as for Schweitzer, the universe is

> Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
> O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
> Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
> Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
> And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
> If such my transports were; for in all things
> I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 420-30)

Thus, the adolescent has discovered with a loving intensity the wonders of the earth, and desires to impart his own emotional overflow to all his fellow inhabitants, be they human, animal, vegetable, or even mineral. In The Prelude iii, Wordsworth tells us:

> To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
> Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,
> I gave a moral life, I saw them feel,
> Or link'd them to some feeling: the great mass
> Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
> That I beheld respired with inward meaning.
>
> (ll. 124-29)

Closely bound-up with the animistic sentiments expressed in the foregoing passages is the youth's discovery of the power of love. From the above, it can be seen that his feelings of love have expanded to include "every nat-

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a great totality and there is no ultimate division between man and the rest of Nature. Although man is a distinctive being, he is still primarily a part of the "whole" pulsing creation. Therefore, it must be affirmed that it is not totally unrealistic to attribute to "unorganic natures" his "own enjoyments". Wordsworth would certainly argue that animism is neither ridiculous, nor that it is simply the product of a fevered imagination. He might agree that it is childish, but for Wordsworth that would be the highest compliment. As he says in The Prelude ii, with regard to his animism,"the power of truth/ Coming in revelation, I convers'd/ With things that really are," (ll. 411-13).

ural form, rock, fruit, or flower,/ Even the loose stones" and that they are now seen as possessing a "moral life" or a deep significance that would never have occurred to the boy who robbed the nests of birds. Moreover, Wordsworth tells us that his comprehension of "love" at this stage of life includes a new "human-heartedness" (The Prelude iv, l. 225); that is, by his interpretation, a softer, tenderer emphasis. It is a less self-centred and self-satisfied form of love with a pensive quality that had hitherto been lacking. Wordsworth explains that as a younger boy, he was apt to interpret life according to that which was "strong, / Deep, gloomy . . . and severe" (The Prelude iv, ll. 242-43). He says that as a boy he would, without thinking deeply on it, translate events in terms of what was mighty and powerful in his environment, for it was the mighty and powerful that most impressed his mind. That which was strong was regarded with awe, and awe was synonymous with love. However, Wordsworth says, in later adolescence there is no lack "of milder thoughts, of love,/ Of innocence, and holiday repose;" (The Prelude iv, ll. 162-63) and further, as a 17-year-old, he has tended to turn ever more "to beauty, and to love/ Enthusiastic, to delight and joy" (ll. 245-46).

Love has become a milder, gentler emotion, not based so much on awe as on those aspects of life that give "delight" and inspire tenderness. The things that child-

hood took for granted are now a central focus for love. Wordsworth describes later adolescence as

> . . . that delightful time of growing youth
> When cravings for the marvellous relent,
> And we begin to love what we have seen;
> And sober truth, experience, sympathy,
> Take stronger hold of us;
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 563-67)[6]

In The Prelude vi, Wordsworth says "I lov'd, and I enjoy'd, that was my chief/ And ruling business" (ll. 77-78).

The new experience of "love" is closely bound-up with the late adolescent's view of humanity and there appear to be several stages in the youth's apprehension of mankind. Wordsworth says of himself:

> A freshness also found I at this time
> In human Life, the life I mean of those
> Whose occupations really I lov'd.
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 181-83)

On his return from his first year at Cambridge, he says:

> . . . I had something of another eye,
> And often, looking round, was mov'd to smiles,
> Such as a delicate work of humour breeds.
> I read, without design, the opinions, thoughts
> Of those plain-living People, in a sense
> Of love and knowledge; with another eye
> I saw the quiet Woodman in the Woods,
> The Shepherd on the Hills.
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 200-207)

The people of his youth have emerged into his immediate range of vision at this time, and Wordsworth sees them in

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[6]The operative word in the last line of this quotation is "stronger", for the qualities of love and "sober truth, experience, sympathy" are not fully apprehended until adulthood, as will be seen in Chapter V.

their various hues, yet with a good-natured acceptance. No longer is the shepherd a giant in the mind of the late adolescent, but a man with faults as well as virtues. The shepherd, the woodman, the villagers, are still to be appreciated for their distinctive worth, but no longer in the blind, childish sense. The fuzzy, impressionistic reality of childhood has given way to a closer scrutiny. This is especially true in Wordsworth's description of the elderly woman with whom he had boarded as a schoolboy. He sees her now with new eyes, her "smooth domestic life,/ Affectionate without uneasiness" and "her clear though shallow stream of piety". He says:

> With thoughts unfelt till now, I saw her read
> Her Bible on the Sunday afternoons;
> And lov'd the book, when she had dropp'd asleep,
> And made of it a pillow for her head.
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 218-21)

Thus, in his encounters with people he has known from boyhood, there is a new understanding, a different perspective. His regard for people is at once more analytical, yet positive and unconditional. He observes them with a kind of love that would never have been possible for him in his younger years.

However, following this discovery about his fellows, Wordsworth, as a late adolescent, goes through yet another stage in which mankind as a total entity is idealized. This vision of man seems to be based on a long-range view of the race and its potentialities. Wordsworth

exemplifies this stage of observation in the following passages:

> Man, if he do but live within the light
> Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad
> His being with a strength that cannot fail.
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 159-61)

When Wordsworth and Robert Jones land in France on their summer vacation, Wordsworth observes:

> Among sequester'd villages we walked,
> And found benevolence and blessedness
> Spread like a fragrance everywhere,
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 367-69)

Further, on the same topic he tells us:

> Oh! sorrow for the Youth who could have seen
> Unchasten'd, unsubdu'd, unaw'd, unrais'd
> To patriarchal dignity of mind,
> And pure simplicity of wish and will,
> Those sanctified abodes of peaceful Man.
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 441-45)

Summing up the feelings of the two youths, Wordsworth says:

> Whate'er in this wide circuit we beheld,
> Or heard, was fitted to our unripe state
> Of intellect and heart. By simple strains
> Of feeling, the pure breath of real life,
> We were not left untouch'd. With such a book
> Before our eyes, we could not chuse but read
> A frequent lesson of sound tenderness,
> The universal reason of mankind,
> The truth of Young and Old.
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 469-77)

And most conclusively, there is this passage in The Prelude viii, where Wordsworth's youth discloses the visionary and optimistic frame of his mind with regard to the nature of man:

> Then rose
> Man, inwardly contemplated, and present
> In my own being, to a loftier height;
> As of all visible natures crown; and first
> In capability of feeling what
> Was to be felt; in being rapt away
> By the divine effect of power and love,
> As, more than anything we know instinct
> With Godhead, and by reason and by will
> Acknowledging dependency sublime.
>
> (ll. 631-40)

One can see, in this passage, a realization on the part of the adolescent[7], that he, himself, is not so much a fixture of Nature as he is a member of the human family. He has a new sense of "belonging" to humanity and a new reverence for the idea of being human; yet this is not so much a "reality" for the youth as it is a spiritual state of mind, for as Wordsworth describes it, the adolescent's vision of man is as "a Spirit/ Living in time and space, and far diffus'd." (The Prelude viii, ll. 763-64)

It would seem that at this stage it is not so much the observance of man and his doings that are found praiseworthy, but the youth's idealistic conception of what the human being represents that is so appealing. The adoles-

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[7] I use the term "realization" here, but wish to make its meaning clear. It is a "realization" because, for the first time, Wordsworth recognizes the distinctive qualities of the human race of which he is a part. This does not imply that such a "realization" in any way places him outside the general framework of Nature, for as stated previously, in Wordsworth's view, man, as well as animals, plants, and all things of the earth, is an integral part of the great "whole". Therefore, this statement alludes only to the youth's apprehension of his specific category within the greater creation.

cent finds in his highly visionary concept of the human being, a sense of his own worth and dignity. What is particularly notable here, is that this observation is not credited to the youth's own invention but rather to two forces outside himself, the two great forces of his childhood; Nature "by striking upon what is found within", and the world of books "and what they picture and record" (The Prelude viii, ll. 767-69).

At this stage then, the adolescent finds a new understanding for, and kinship with, other human creatures. While at Cambridge, Wordsworth says of himself that

> Imagination slept,
> And yet not utterly: I could not print
> Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps
> Of generations of illustrious Men,
> Unmov'd;
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 260-64)

Wordsworth contends that even at a time when the imaginative faculty is at a low ebb, taking second place to a round of superficial pleasures, the adolescent cannot help but feel a sense of pride and awe when he considers the heights to which human behaviour and talent can ascend.

Even while he observes human behaviour at its peak, the adolescent concept of man goes through still one more stage, the awareness of folly and corruption. Wordsworth gives a vivid description of the dawning awareness of the imperfections of humanity in The Prelude viii:

> Erelong transported hence as in a dream
> I found myself begirt with temporal shapes
> Of vice and folly thrust upon my view,

> Objects of sport, and ridicule, and scorn,
> Manners and characters discriminate,
> And little busy passions that eclips'd,
> As well they might, the impersonated thought,
> The idea or abstraction of the Kind.
>
> (ll. 641-48)

His residence at Cambridge brings him into contact not only with the best in human endeavour, made more attractive by its identification with his childhood interpretation of human nature, but with a side of human behaviour less pleasing. Wordsworth says:

> . . . being brought more near
> As I was now, to guilt and wretchedness,
> I trembled, thought of human life at times
> With an indefinite terror and dismay
> Such as the storms and angry elements
> Had bred in me, but gloomier far, a dim
> Analogy to uproar and misrule,
> Disquiet, danger, and obscurity.
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 657-64)

There is, in this passage, a reference that hearkens back to Wordsworth's boyhood experience of the pleasure and pain principle. Human life is compared in some of its aspects with the storms of Nature; yet, Wordsworth says, "gloomier far", and the adolescent has a frightening glimpse of the negative side of the humanity he had reverenced in childhood. Yet it is "through dislike and most offensive pain" that Wordsworth believes he "was to the truth conducted" (The Prelude viii, ll. 673-74), that truth being

> that by acting well
> And understanding, I should learn to love
> The end of life and every thing we know.
>
> (The Prelude viii, ll. 675-77)

Thus, the vision of man in childhood, as that of a noble being blending into the natural scene, above vice, folly, and pettiness, has undergone a decisive change. Man is now an individual entity as well as being an integral part of the natural world; he is no longer larger than life but has returned to normal size. There is still an optimistic faith in the propensities of human nature, but it is somewhat less illusory; there is a realization on the part of the adolescent that evil does exist in the heart and actions of the human being.

There is one final aspect of the psychology of the late adolescent that must be examined--that is, the place of intellect. For the first time, intellect comes into its own, in both a general and a specific manner. No longer is it suspect as it had been in Wordsworth's attitude toward the "intellectual" child. Whereas in childhood, Wordsworth would have instinct and fanciful imagination prevail, in late youth he visualizes the blooming of a more penetrating interest in the contemplation of the meaning of the universe, as well as a wider application and appreciation of formalized study[8].

Respecting the generalized use of the intellect,

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[8]This is not to say that Wordsworth has reversed his position, for he makes it clear that he does not approve of the pedantic approach to learning that he himself encountered even at university level. He has simply discovered the values to be found in the classics and in mathematics, particularly as they are self-discovered.

Wordsworth says:

> . . . my mind
> Seem'd busier in itself than heretofore;
> At least, I more directly recognised
> My powers and habits:
> . . . . . .
> I look'd for universal things; perused
> The common countenance of earth and heaven;
> And, turning the mind in upon itself,
> Pored, watch'd, expected, listen'd; spread my thoughts
> And spread them with a wider creeping;
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 103-14)

The youth in late adolescence has reached a stage where he is fascinated by thoughts of creation and muses on the inter-relationship between the "common countenance of earth" and the spiritual distance of the heavens. Moreover, for the first time he analyzes his own thoughts, no longer being content to imbibe what is with unthinking acceptance, nor being content to merely regard others with closer scrutiny. Now he must examine his own thoughts to the minutest degree. This kind of reflection, says Wordsworth, strengthens the youth's concept of the holistic character of creation and Nature becomes more than ever a vital pulse felt through all things, which are mutually indebted, like stars in "one galaxy of life and joy".

United with the new-found insight into the "oneness" of the universe, is an increasing tendency toward its opposite--the discrimination of separate entities. The youth develops a curiosity that must penetrate the surface of all things; parts are seen as unique and the amaz-

ing diversity of matter is recognized and appreciated. Just as the youth has deepened his vision to probe the hearts of individual men, he must probe the specific differences of objects. This great search is described by Wordsworth as having "spake perpetual logic to my soul,/ And by an unrelenting agency/ Did bind my feelings, even as in a chain." (The Prelude iii, ll. 165-67) All things are part of the great "whole", but at the same time, the "whole" is comprised of a series of fascinating, single entities.

With regard to books, Wordsworth's adolescent has also expanded his horizons. In The Prelude iii, there is a definite emphasis on the appreciation of good literature and of mathematics. While at Cambridge, Wordsworth learns to pay tribute to Chaucer, to "sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven/ With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace" and to Milton, a "Soul awful!", "uttering odious truth" and walking with "conscious step of purity and pride" (ll. 276-93). In The Prelude vi, Wordsworth says of his own late adolescence that:

> . . . now the bonds
> Of indolent and vague society
> Relaxing in their hold, I liv'd henceforth
> More to myself, read more, reflected more,
> Felt more, and settled daily into habits
> More promising . . . .
> . . . many books
> Were read in process of this time, devour'd,
> Tasted or skimm'd, or studiously perus'd,
> Yet with no settled plan.
>
> (ll. 20-29)

The youth's attitude with regard to authors has also changed. Wordsworth says:

> . . . The instinctive humbleness,
> Upheld even by the very name and thought
> Of printed books and authorship, began
> To melt away, and further, the dread awe
> Of mighty names was soften'd down, and seem'd
> Approachable, admitting fellowship
> Of modest sympathy.
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 69-75)

In the field of mathematics, Wordsworth finds pleasure in geometry, for in its abstract speculations, a system and logical sequence are learned that give to the young man "enough to exalt, to chear me and compose". From such study he has drawn "a pleasure calm and deeper, a still sense/ Of permanent and universal sway/ And paramount endowment in the mind" (The Prelude vi, ll. 151-53). What seems to hold the great appeal for the young man is the fact that such study is beyond the "welterings of passion"; it offers a peace that transcends ordinary emotion and a comforting release from "feelings" that plague the adolescent[9]. As Wordsworth says:

> Mighty is the charm
> Of those abstractions to a mind beset
> With images, and haunted by itself;
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 178-80)

Geometry becomes a joy in itself, as well as a form of

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[9]It must be remembered here that Wordsworth is speaking of his own delight in finding a study that allows him to be free of "welterings of passion". However, the reference to adolescence being plagued by a series of unruly emotions would apply to youth as a whole.

self-forgetfulness. He revels in his preoccupation with intellect:

> And specially delightful unto me
> Was that clear Synthesis built up aloft
> So gracefully, even then when it appear'd
> No more than as a plaything, or a toy
> Embodied to the sense, not what it is
> In verity, an independent world
> Created out of pure Intelligence.
>
> (The Prelude vi, ll. 181-87)

When Wordsworth appears to contradict himself in regard to the value of intellectual attainment, as in the famous poems "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned"[10], it can be seen that such contradiction arises out of the problem that continually besets Wordsworth--the problem of Nature's teaching tending to be discarded in favour of intellectual dissection. Where a proper balance is achieved, Wordsworth feels that the late adolescent can, and should, exercise his intellectual faculties.

The role that Nature plays in shaping the adolescent is a vital one for Wordsworth. It has been shown that in early adolescence he sees a gradual falling-away of the intense joy in the pleasures of vigorous activity made possible by Nature, and an increasing tendency to a state of contemplation whereby Nature becomes prized for Her own sake. In Wordsworth's view, Nature takes first place in the affections of the early youth, but despite

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[10]See Chapter V, pp. 147-49 for a discussion of these poems.

the growth of this love there is still a gradual abatement in the spontaneity of the relationship, an inexorable lessening of the strong instinctive tie between man and the natural world. It is interesting to turn to the "Immortality Ode", where Wordsworth describes the adolescent's interaction with Nature as something akin to being bathed in the last brilliant rays of the setting sun. Wordsworth says:

> The Youth, who daily farther from the east
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid
> Is on his way attended;
>
> (ll. 72-75)

In other words, Nature is still of uppermost importance in the development of the youth, but the importance has become more cerebral in quality. It has lost much of its instinctive spontaneity and gained a conscious quality, being now sought deliberately rather than absorbed unthinkingly.

Nevertheless, the love of Nature is still a "vision splendid" in late youth. As Wordsworth says of himself in The Prelude ii:

> From Nature and her overflowing soul
> I had receiv'd so much that all my thoughts
> Were steep'd in feeling;
>
> (ll. 416-18)

As in his boyhood, Nature impresses upon the late adolescent Her beauties and Her rigours, Her gentleness and Her harshness. He, in his turn, is fully responsive

to Her call and is at the same time investing Her with his own perceptions. This imaginative responsiveness to Nature is described thus by Wordsworth:

> . . . whatsoe'er of Terror or of Love,
> Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on
> From transitory passion, unto this
> I was as wakeful, even, as waters are
> To the sky's motion; in a kindred sense
> Of passion was as obedient as a lute
> That waits upon the touches of the wind.
>
> (The Prelude iii, ll. 132-38)

Wordsworth tells us that in first taking-up residence at Cambridge, he is dazzled by new sights, new sounds, and the multifarious ways of men. However, he is also sometimes troubled and perplexed by the variety of experiences and when the initial glitter is tarnished he seeks comfort by leaving the crowds behind and pacing the level fields of the Cambridge district. Although far removed from the Nature of his boyhood, Wordsworth is able to recapture the sense of peace within himself that has been impressed forever by "shapes sublime", and he realizes that Nature's influence in his early years has provided him with "the strength and consolation" which are not subject to time or place[11].

However, his new diversions create a corresponding neglect of intercourse with Nature, and this change in

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[11]If Nature can be said to have inspired any negative influence, it is that this sense of independence was almost too great, that it made him "ill-tutor'd for captivity" (The Prelude iii, l. 363) and left him with "that overlove/ Of freedom planted in me from the very first" (The Prelude vi, ll. 44-45).

attitude is described in all its subtlety by Wordsworth as an "inner falling-off" (The Prelude iv, l. 270). Wordsworth claims that he still loves deeply the external world of Nature; perhaps, he contends, "more deeply even than ever" yet there is an awareness that he is no longer the "wild unworldly-minded Youth". Try as he might, something is gone; he cannot recapture the emotions of his late boyhood and early adolescence. All the events of the academic and social scene conspire to make such a return impossible. Wordsworth says:

> The very garments that I wore appear'd
> To prey upon my strength, and stopp'd the course
> And quiet stream of self-forgetfulness.
>
> (The Prelude iv, ll. 292-94)

Despite the "falling-off", Wordsworth is able to maintain that as late as the third year of Cambridge, "Nature then was sovereign in my heart,/ And mighty forms seizing a youthful Fancy/ Had given a charter to irregular hopes." (The Prelude vi, ll. 346-48)

The difference in his interaction with Nature is shown in The Prelude vi, where Wordsworth tells of the reactions of himself and Robert Jones to Nature's beauties. He says their admiration was not

> as if the mind
> Itself were nothing, a mean pensioner
> On outward forms, . . .
>
> (ll. 666-68)

But rather that whatever

> I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream
> That flow'd into a kindred stream, a gale
> That help'd me forwards, did administer
> To grandeur and to tenderness, to the one
> Directly, but to tender thoughts by means
> Less often instantaneous in effect;
> Conducted me to these along a path
> Which in the main was more circuitous.
>
> (ll. 673-80)

Imagination has come into its own, taking its role as equal partner in the development of understanding of the natural world.

Despite the influence of the imaginative power and the lessening of the instinctive and spontaneous forces of Nature at this time of life, Wordsworth can still declare that

> Youth maintains, . . .
> In all conditions of society,
> Communion more direct and intimate
> With Nature, and the inner strength she has,
> And hence, oft-times, no less, with Reason too,
> Than Age or Manhood, even.
>
> (The Prelude x, ll. 605-10)

Wordsworth's final analysis of the role of Nature in his later adolescence can be found in this passage from The Prelude viii:

> Thus from a very early age, O Friend!
> My thoughts had been attracted more and more
> By slow gradations towards human kind
> And to the good and ill of human life;
> Nature had led me on, and now I seem'd
> To travel independent of her help,
> As if I had forgotten her; but no,
> My Fellow beings still were unto me
> Far less than she was, though the scale of love
> Were filling fast, 'twas light, as yet, compared

With that in which her mighty objects lay.

(11. 860-70)

iii. Summary

We have seen that childhood, for Wordsworth, is a time of spontaneous action, vitality, and self-preoccupation. It is a time when sensation is all; external objects are felt rather than heeded and awareness of other people is limited to the effect produced on the child's well-being. It is not conscious, but rather unconscious, self-centredness. The child, in short, is a glad animal being.

With the advent of adolescence, Wordsworth sees the development of an increasing awareness of the external world as having a value in itself, although certainly not divorced from the individual consciousness. This is a time of life, Wordsworth believes, when sensation is still strong, but is coupled with reflectiveness. What is experienced is also thought about. In a general sense, it may be said that adolescence is a time of "feeling", when sensibility is uppermost, when there is joy in revelling in fanciful illusions about oneself and about the world, and yet as Wordsworth says of himself:

> . . . mingling with these delights
> Was something of stern mood, an under-thirst
> Of vigour, never utterly asleep.
>
> (The Prelude vi, 11. 488-90)

Moreover, it is a period when love becomes a vital force

in the perceptions of the individual, when the youth experiences the first raptures of an emotional involvement that is not entirely self-absorbed, but extends to other things and to other people.

With regard to the intellect, the point is that the mind is not to be shaped intellectually while the boy is yet a boy--intellect can properly be left alone until the youth has reached his later teens and then the rigours of academic training may indeed serve important purposes.

Perhaps the best statement on human youth in its relationship to Nature is to be found in this passage from The Prelude vi, when Wordsworth and Robert Jones leave the "great expectancy" of war stirring in Europe to return to England and Wordsworth describes his feelings:

> A Stripling, scarcely of the household then
> Of social life, I look'd upon these things
> As from a distance, heard, and saw, and felt,
> Was touch'd, but with no intimate concern;
> I seem'd to move among them as a bird
> Moves through the air, or as a fish pursues
> Its business, in its proper element;
> I needed not that joy, I did not need
> Such help; the ever-living Universe,
> And independent spirit of pure youth
> Were with me at that season, and delight
> Was in all places spread around my steps
> As constant as the grass upon the fields.
>
> (11. 693-705)

CHAPTER V

MATURITY

We have considered Wordsworth's ideas on the developmental stages of childhood and youth and their interaction with the teachings of Nature. It is time now to examine Wordsworth's view of the role of Nature in maturity.

The attainment of full maturity is dependent upon all that has gone before, and Wordsworth believes that every man has the potential to become the ideal, fully-mature individual who reaches a point of total communion with the soul of Nature. However, if development is arrested at some stage, an individual may never attain what Wordsworth considers to be the fullest expression of maturity.

While Wordsworth's conclusions about maturity are applicable to many persons in this age group, it must be remembered that they are, to a large extent, derived from his own experiences and observations rather than being based on any particular psychological or scientific system.

1. Early Manhood

One might say that for Wordsworth, early manhood

dates from the point when he leaves the comparative safety of university life at Cambridge to take up independent residence in London. At first, the joy of late youth is uppermost in his feelings and he says, "life then was new,/ The senses easily pleased" (The Prelude vii, ll. 439-40). He is predisposed to enjoy the sights and sounds of the City as a great spectacle that ought, in all its historical grandeur, to be paid its due; and he revels, among other things, in the liveliness of theatre-going[1]. Wordsworth says:

> For then,
> Though surely no mean progress had been made
> In meditations holy and sublime,
> Yet something of a girlish child-like gloss
> Of novelty surviv'd for scenes like these;
>
> (The Prelude vii, ll. 475-79)

If this should appear trivial, he continues, it is

> yet not to be despis'd
> By those who have observ'd the curious props
> By which the perishable hours of life
> Rest on each other, and the world of thought
> Exists and is sustained.
>
> (ll. 491-95)

It is interesting to note that Wordsworth acknowledges the lasting importance of these years of adherence to indulgences that lack dignity and sobriety, and particularly that he attributes the survival of joy in early manhood to "something of a girlish child-like gloss". He assures us that "meditations holy and sublime" are making "surely no

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[1]See The Prelude vii, ll. 465-75.

mean progress" and he is pleased to admit the "child-like" elements present in his enjoyments. However, what is of greater significance for maturity is Wordsworth's lack of embarrassment in recognizing and acknowledging the softer, feminine characteristics of his mind, which become of increasing importance as basically constructive constituents in the formation of the fully-mature personality.

Despite his pleasure in much of the colour of the London scene, Wordsworth begins to view man with less complacency than he did at Cambridge, and his ever-developing attendance to the degradation of human life causes Wordsworth for a time to see "a barrier" that is "splitting the race of Man/ In twain" (see The Prelude vii, 414-26). It is notable that the shocks to Wordsworth's moral values and his distress in the temporary overthrow of his firm belief in the essential nobility of the human being is treated with "ardent meditation" followed by a "milder sadness". His sorrow is for the individual; it is not as yet applied to the whole of mankind. He says that he is not yet prepared to cope with the contemplation of misery on a large scale.

London becomes for Wordsworth a scene of "blank confusion" offering a perpetual whirl of trifling amusements. The people themselves seem "reduced/ To one identity" (The Prelude vii, ll. 695-703). But oppressive, wearying, and bleak as it seems, Wordsworth's childhood

and youthful training in the bosom of Nature has enabled him to be "triumphant over all those loathesome sights/ Of wretchedness and vice" (The Prelude viii, ll. 65-66). His early reverence for the shepherds and other simple inhabitants of the countryside have made him feel a sympathy for, and brotherhood with, his fellow man that cannot be undermined. As he tells us in The Prelude viii, ll. 797-810, Nature and the human imagination are the great team which can provide an inner strength that transcends all that is ugly or debasing.

Wordsworth's removal from London to Paris in 1791 is his "trial by fire" in his own early manhood. He is at first indifferent to the revolutionary fervour stirring in France because, as he puts it, he grew up in a district where

> Distinction lay open to all that came,
> And wealth and titles were in less esteem
> Than talents and successful industry.
>
> (The Prelude ix, ll. 233-35)

Therefore, the quest for independence and "equal rights" seems to Wordsworth "nothing out of nature's certain course,/ A gift that rather was come late than soon." (The Prelude ix, ll. 252-53)

However, this diffidence is shaken by a variety of events. Wordsworth's passionate love-affair with Annette Vallon expands his consciousness of his own emotions, and his friendship with Michael Beaupuy reinforces his most

deeply-felt convictions as well as enlarging his sympathies. Wordsworth and Beaupuy both see the best in man in relation to his closeness to the earth. They see

> . . . in rudest men
> Self-sacrifice the firmest, generous love
> And continence of mind, and sense of right
> Uppermost in the midst of fiercest strife.
>
> (The Prelude ix, ll. 392-95)

Beaupuy leads Wordsworth to hope fervently for the day when they will

> see the earth
> Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
> The industrious, and the lowly Child of Toil,
> All institutes for ever blotted out
> That legalized exclusion, empty pomp
> Abolish'd, sensual state and cruel power
> Whether by edict of the one or few,
> And finally, as sum and crown of all,
> Should see the People having a strong hand
> In making their own Laws, whence better days
> To all mankind.
>
> (The Prelude ix, ll. 523-33)

When Britain declares war on France, Wordsworth is not prepared to face this crushing blow to his belief in basic human goodness. He says:

> What had been a pride
> Was now a shame; my likings and my loves
> Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry,
> And hence a blow which, in maturer age,
> Would but have touch'd the judgment struck more deep
> Into sensations near the heart:
>
> (The Prelude x, ll. 769-74)

When France, too, becomes an oppressor, Wordsworth turns in desperation to the philosophy of Godwin that "promised to abstract the hopes of man/ Out of his feel-

ings" (The Prelude x, ll. 808-809). In summing up the state of his mind at the time of his period of Godwinism, Wordsworth says that what was mainly wrong was that such searching "did not lie in nature" and thus he

> . . . sacrificed
> The exactness of a comprehensive mind
> To scrupulous and microscopic views
> That furnish'd out materials for a work
> Of false imagination, placed beyond
> The limits of experience and of truth.
>
> (The Prelude x, ll. 844-49)

He says that his heart was "turn'd aside/ From nature by external accidents" and that he was "confounded more and more,/ Misguiding and misguided." His perplexity and endless dissection of all ideas, passions, motives, and morals, leaves him at last "sick, wearied out with contrarieties". He finally abandons "moral questions in despair"[2], and at length is brought back to what he sees as "right reason" through the influence of his sister, Dorothy and friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The influence of the reunion with his sister and his meeting with Coleridge, play an invaluable part in Wordsworth's spiritual resurrection. He pays tribute to their effect in many passages of The Prelude, for example in these lines addressed to Coleridge and Dorothy where he says[3]:

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[2]For more on Wordsworth's period of Godwinism, see (The Prelude xi, ll. 55-120).

[3]See the tribute to Coleridge in (The Prelude xiii, ll. 247-59).

> . . . --Ah! then it was
> That Thou, most precious Friend! about this time
> First known to me, didst lend a living help
> To regulate my Soul, and then it was
> That the beloved Woman in whose sight
> Those days were pass'd, now speaking in a voice
> Of sudden admonition, like a brook
> That does but cross a lonely road, and now
> Seen, heard and felt, and caught at every turn,
> Companion never lost through many a league,
> Maintain'd for me a saving intercourse
> With my true self;
>
> (The Prelude x, ll. 905-16)

In the notable expression of gratitude he pays to Dorothy in The Prelude xiii (ll. 211-46), one can trace what has happened within Wordsworth during this crucial period of his life. The "over-sternness" that he sees as having been the dominant feature of his personality, the masculine quality that "too exclusively" esteemed the beauty of that which is awesome or terrible, although somewhat softened by the fancies of his adolescence, is still, Wordsworth feels, heading him on a continuing course of emotion "too reckless of mild grace". Because of the influence of Dorothy, Wordsworth believes his nature has been altered, or at least balanced, for the better. The feminine element, encouraged and intensified by Dorothy, gives him a "new sense/ Of exquisite regard for common things", a "more refined humanity" that softens the "crevices" and "chambers" of his soul.

With such new understanding, Wordsworth is filled with dismay as he reflects on the temporary period of despondency and loss of faith that led him to abandon the

deeper teachings of Nature in favour of analytical presumption. He says:

> Oh! Soul of Nature! that dost overflow
> With passion and with life, what feeble men
> Walk on this earth! how feeble have I been
> When thou wert in thy strength!
>
> (The Prelude xi, ll. 146-49)

In The Prelude xii, he pays this moving tribute to the underlying reverence for Nature that has aided in the regaining of his perspective:

> I had been taught to reverence a Power
> That is the very quality and shape
> And image of right reason, that matures
> Her processes by steadfast laws, gives birth
> To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
> No heat of passion, or excessive zeal,
> No vain conceits, provokes to no quick turns
> Of self-applauding intellect, but lifts
> The Being into magnanimity;
> Holds up before the mind, intoxicate
> With present objects and the busy dance
> Of things that pass away, a temperate shew
> Of objects that endure, and by this course
> Disposes her, when over-fondly set
> On leaving her incumbrances behind
> To seek in Man, and in the frame of life,
> Social and individual, what there is
> Desireable, affecting, good or fair
> Of kindred permanence, the gifts divine
> And universal, the pervading grace
> That hath been, is, and shall be. Above all
> Did Nature bring again that wiser mood
> More deeply re-established in my soul,
> Which, seeing little worthy or sublime
> In what we blazon with the pompous names
> Of power and action, early tutor'd me
> To look with feelings of fraternal love
> Upon those unassuming things, that hold
> A silent station in this beauteous world.
>
> (ll. 24-52)

Thus, he is returned to himself and finds "once more in Man an object of delight/ Of pure imagination, and of love"

(The Prelude xii, ll. 54-55). His early training has provided him with a strength that, in the end, despite his disillusionment with the forces of politics and the impact of Godwin's rational philosophy, leaves his trust "firmer in the feelings which had stood/ The test of such a trial" and "clearer far" is his "sense of what was excellent and right". He feels a sense of proportion within himself and is prepared to seek ultimate answers in the "familiar face of life" (The Prelude xii, ll. 60-68).

In his early manhood then, Wordsworth appears to have experienced many emotions common to people in this age group; the heady pleasure of independence, the joys of revelling in the discovery of a world of new entertainments and novelties that please every sense, and the thrilling abandonment of "self" to romantic love and involvement.

However, at the same time, the dawning of adulthood brings with it an uncompromising presentation of the facts of much of human life. The rather sanguine outlook of childhood and youth gives way to a clearer view of the often upsetting realities of existence.

If one clings to a belief in the basic nobility of man and is convinced of human perfectibility, yet is faced with daily examples of corruption and debasement, one will be led inevitably to seek a solution to the problem. So, for Wordsworth, as for countless generations of young adults, the solution appeared to exist in revolutionary

formulas which offered seemingly simple remedies for complex disorders.

For Wordsworth, as for so many others, the failure of such remedies and the resulting realization of the simplistic quality of his outlook was overwhelming in its psychological effect and drove him to the extreme of rejecting trust in his emotions in favour of accepting the panacea of the narrow bounds of rationalism.

This course of action could only result in a descent into melancholia for Wordsworth, as it was in direct opposition to his basically sensitive and passionate nature. The re-establishment of his mental equilibrium was achieved partly due to the combined efforts of Dorothy and Coleridge, and partly because of the solid foundation laid throughout the many years of his intense communion with Nature.

So, for Wordsworth, the synthesis of imagination and Nature is achieved--the integration that is necessary for the attainment of true maturity. However, such attainment, while the highest aim for all men, is not reached without involving some elements of loss as well as the elements of gain, and it is to the loss and gain to be found in the mature experience that we now turn.

ii. Loss in Maturity

When a man approaches maturity, he must face the realization, Wordsworth tells us, that life is lived

> Not in Utopia, subterraneous Fields,
> Or some secreted Island, Heaven knows where,
> But in the very world which is the world
> Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,
> We find our happiness, or not at all.
>
> (The Prelude x, ll. 724-28)

This realization necessarily implies a sense of loss, which Wordsworth describes in the following passage:

> I saw the Spring return, when I was dead
> To deeper hope, yet had I joy for her,
> And welcomed her benevolence, rejoiced
> In common with the Children of her Love,
> Plants, insects, beasts in field, and birds in bower.
> So neither were complacency nor peace
> Nor tender yearnings wanting for my good
> Through those distracted times; in Nature still
> Glorying, I found a counterpoise in her,
> Which, when the spirit of evil was at height
> Maintain'd for me a secret happiness;
> Her I resorted to, and lov'd so much
> I seem'd to love as much as heretofore;
> And yet this passion, fervent as it was,
> Had suffer'd change; how could there fail to be
> Some change, if merely hence, that years of life
> Were going on, and with them loss or gain
> Inevitable, sure alternative.
>
> (The Prelude xi, ll. 24-41)

Thus, in his period of deepest dejection, Wordsworth tells us that Nature still provided a "counterpoise" and maintained for him "a secret happiness". Yet there is a change. There is no longer the jubilant outpouring of his late youth. The "passion" is admitted to be a quieter emotion, for the phrase "fervent as it was" is balanced by the phrase "had suffer'd change".

The change and the sense of loss is reflected in passages throughout The Prelude and various other poems, and seems to stress mainly the loss of spontaneity and joy

that were so prevalent in his growing years. Wordsworth asks, in The Prelude ii:

> . . . is there one, the wisest and the best
> Of all mankind, who does not sometimes wish
> For things which cannot be, who would not give,
> If so he might, to duty and to truth
> The eagerness of infantine desire?
>
> (ll. 22-26)

Later, in the same Book of The Prelude, Wordsworth compares his childhood with his adult feelings:

> . . . a Boy I lov'd the sun,
> Not as I since have lov'd him, as a pledge
> And surety of our earthly life, a light
> Which while we view we feel we are alive;
> But, for this cause, that I had seen him lay
> His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
> The western mountain touch his setting orb,
> In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
> Of happiness, my blood appear'd to flow
> With its own pleasure, and I breath'd with joy.
>
> (ll. 184-93)

In later childhood and early youth then, Wordsworth has "lov'd the sun" for its beauty--the beauty that corresponded with his own glad animal spirits. It was a "thoughtless" love, but one buoyed-up by "excess/ Of happiness". In maturity, the love has become bound-up with "truth" as a sustaining life-giver. The sun is appreciated and enjoyed, but the emphasis is on its necessity--gone is the "eagerness of infantine desire".

The loss of spontaneous joy is regretted in this sonnet from the Duddon series:

> Return, Content! For fondly I pursued,
> Even when a child, the Streams--unheard, unseen;
> Through tangled woods, impending rocks between;

> Or, free as air, with flying inquest viewed
> The sullen reservoirs whence their bold brood--
> Pure as the morning, fretful, boisterous, keen,
> Green as the salt-sea billows, white and green--
> Poured down the hills, a choral multitude!
> Nor have I tracked their course for scanty gains;
> They taught me random cares and truant joys,
> That shield from mischief and preserve from stains
> Vague minds, while men are growing out of boys;
> Maturer Fancy owes to their rough noise
> Impetuous thoughts that brook not servile reins.
>
> (Poetical Works III, p. 257)

Here, Wordsworth traces the course of his enjoyment in Nature; from childhood, when "free as air" he pursues the streams in their varying moods and from them learns "random cares and truant joys" which, he says, "shield from mischief and preserve from stains/ Vague minds" and give to growing youth the "impetuous thoughts" that help to preserve him from the "servile reins" that conventional society would put upon him. However, as he reaches manhood, Wordsworth cries "Return, Content!" for the glorious freedom he has known is no longer quite accessible.

Wordsworth sees his own loss in comparison with his sister[4], as he addresses her in the "Tintern Abbey Lines":

> . . . thou my dearest Friend,
> My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
> The language of my former heart, and read

---

[4]The reason why Dorothy has maintained her "state of grace" in Nature is that

> . . . wise as Women are
> When genial circumstance hath favor'd them,
> She welcom'd what was given, and craved no more.
>
> (The Prelude xi, ll. 205-207)

My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister!

(ll. 115-21)

What often happens to the individual's relationship with Nature in maturity is reflected in the sonnet "The world is too much with us" (Poetical Works III, pp. 18-19), where Wordsworth tells us we are so busy with the mundane, the "getting and spending", the routine of daily existence that "we lay waste our powers" of imaginative insight into what is really important. In our dedication to the constant pursuit of acquisitions and preoccupation with prudent expenditures, we have no time for the "Sea that bares her bosom to the moon". Far better, says Wordsworth, to believe in pagan superstitions and at least enjoy moments of excitement and fanciful reverie, than to exist in the wasteland of dreary convention that repays us with a "sordid boon".

Particularly distressing to Wordsworth is the inability of the adult to maintain the emotion of joy. For instance, he gives us this contrast in the poem "Resolution and Independence":

I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy:
The pleasant season did my heart employ:
My own remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

(ll. 17-21)

For a few wonderful moments, the adult is able to lose

himself in the thoughtless happiness of childhood, but then

> . . . as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
> Of joy in minds that can no further go,
> As high as we have mounted in delight
> In our dejection do we sink as low;
>
> (ll. 22-25)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 235-40)

Unlike childhood, maturity is unable to sustain freedom from the pressing realities and the anxieties and fears that plague the mind. Joy is all too quickly succeeded by dejection and the "pleasant season" is replaced by personal worries and "all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy."

If man's affective domain undergoes change and loss as he reaches maturity, so too, his intellect suffers loss as it becomes increasingly oppressed by analytical dissection and criticism. Wordsworth says of himself:

> I am sad
> At thoughts of raptures, now for ever flown,
> Even unto tears, I sometimes could be sad
> To think of, to read over, many a page,
> Poems withal of name, which at that time
> Did never fail to entrance me, and are now
> Dead in my eyes as is a theatre
> Fresh emptied of spectators.
>
> (The Prelude v, ll. 568-75)

He argues against the tendency to allow the "barren intermeddling subtleties" to become more influential than the genuine intellectual development that comes out of contact with Nature in conjunction with imagination. In "Expost-

ulation and Reply", Wordsworth poses himself as a school-boy being admonished for spending half his time dreaming, rather than working at his texts. He replies:

> "The eye--it cannot choose but see;
> We cannot bid the ear be still;
> Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
> Against or with our will.
>
> (ll. 17-20)
>
> "Nor less I deem that there are Powers
> Which of themselves our minds impress;
> That we can feed this mind of ours
> In a wise passiveness.
>
> (ll. 21-24)
>
> "Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
> Of things for ever speaking,
> That nothing of itself will come,
> But we must still be seeking?
>
> (ll. 25-28)
>
> (Poetical Works IV, p. 56)

Similarly, in "The Tables Turned", the comparison between the involuntary reception of Nature's teaching is compared with the scientifically-oriented intellect. The second stanza is a revelation of the beauty of Nature:

> The sun, above the mountain's head,
> A freshening lustre mellow
> Through all the long green fields has spread,
> His first sweet evening yellow.
>
> (ll. 5-8)

Compared to this:

> Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
> Come, hear the woodland linnet,
> How sweet his music! on my life,
> There's more of wisdom in it.
>
> (ll. 9-12)

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
And he is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your Teacher.

(ll. 13-16)

According to Wordsworth, if Nature is a suitable educator for the child, she is no less necessary for the adult.

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless--
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

(ll. 17-20)

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

(ll. 21-24)

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--
We murder to dissect.

(ll. 25-28)

Finally, then:

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

(ll. 29-32)

(Poetical Works IV, p. 57)

The simplicity of both the above-quoted poems tends to obscure, for some people, the intensity of the message they convey. As in childhood, Wordsworth's dislike is not for books but for pedantry. The adult is just as likely as the over-trained child to become so buried in

speculation and theorizing, so spiritually deadened by the "dull and endless strife" of textual study, that he no longer appreciates the multitudinous objects that Nature presents to his senses. To Wordsworth, the adult is in worse condition than the child because it is more difficult for him to enter into a spontaneous appreciation of the world about him; therefore, he must consciously enter "into the light of things" and give himself over to the "wisdom breathed by health" and the "truth breathed by cheerfulness" that Nature is prepared to offer. The oft-criticized stanza

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.

may be seen as a deliberately over-emphasized attempt to recall man to a vision of life that places him in his proper perspective as a part of the natural scene. To open one's mind and senses to all things in Nature is, to Wordsworth, a more trustworthy preparation for forming judgments than are man-made systems and ideologies. To constantly dissect what one experiences is to murder the "truth" of things; in other words, the "whole" is larger than the sum of its parts. Therefore, Wordsworth implores man to "feed" his mind "in a wise passiveness" and to approach Nature only with "a heart/ That watches and receives." Nature is "for ever speaking" to us if we are wise enough to stop and listen. As Wordsworth says of

Coleridge:

> . . . Thou, my Friend! art one
> More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee
> Science appears but, what in truth she is,
> Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
> But as a succedaneum, and a prop
> To our infirmity. Thou art no slave
> Of that false secondary power, by which,
> In weakness, we create distinctions, then
> Deem that our puny boundaries are things
> Which we perceive, and not which we have made.
>
> (The Prelude ii, ll. 215-24)

Coleridge is, in Wordsworth's eyes, the man who successfully combines philosophical exploration with the knowledge that comes only from wholehearted responsiveness to Nature, and who is not foolish enough to suppose that human distinctions and "puny boundaries" are the ultimate reality. For Wordsworth, the man "whose mind is but the mind of his own eyes,/ He is a Slave; the meanest we can meet!" ("Personal Talk" ll. 27-28, Poetical Works IV, pp. 73-75)

The penalty that is paid for too much prying by the "meddling intellect" is illustrated in "Star-Gazers", a poem that is quite simply a story of people queuing-up to have a look through a telescope. But, Wordsworth asks, what is wrong? Is the telescope at fault; are the heavens themselves a disappointment; are people discontented with themselves when they have viewed far spaces; are people incapable of encompassing what they see; or does what is seen provide such "a grave and steady joy" that it must be held in the heart of the viewer as a vision of something

"silent and divine". These rhetorical questions are answered as Wordsworth sums up his own belief in the last stanza:

> Whatever be the cause, 'tis sure that they who pry and pore
> Seem to meet with little gain, seem less happy than before:
> One after One they take their turns, nor have I one espied
> That doth not slackly go away, as if dissatisfied.

(Poetical Works II, pp. 219-20)

Thus, to make an assessment of Wordsworth's sense of the loss that must inevitably occur in maturity, it can be seen from the foregoing that the greatest loss is probably the diminution of the spontaneous joy in life that is natural to childhood and still fairly prevalent in youth. When the adult has his moments of careless pleasure, he is unable to maintain them for more than short periods because he is so fettered by responsibility, so weighed-down by care and worry. The adult must work at his enjoyment of Nature unless he is to become deadened to Her great gifts. Man's intellect also suffers from its unfortunate preoccupation with rationalizing, with the sifting and sorting process that is reminiscent of Wordsworth's over-trained child of The Prelude v, who is a prodigy in learning but "takes nothing upon trust".

Taken on the whole, it might be said that for Wordsworth, "loss" in maturity involves a kind of dulling of receptivity to the Presence of Nature and an inability

to sustain a sense of wonder and pleasure in those things of life that are mysterious and unexplainable.

iii. Gain in Maturity

It is not in Wordsworth's nature to brood endlessly about the losses that must be faced in adulthood. Nor, despite his view of its joyous attributes, does he dwell with a morbid nostalgia on the period of childhood. If there is "loss", there is also "gain" in the years of maturity.

Wordsworth believes that over the years of his self-discovery as "a meditative, oft a suffering Man", he has acquired, as other men should acquire,

> A more judicious knowledge of what makes
> The dignity of individual Man,
> Of Man, no composition of the thought,
> Abstraction, shadow, image, but the man
> Of whom we read, the man whom we behold
> With our own eyes;

(The Prelude xii, ll. 82-87)

From experience and observation of other human beings, he has reached the conclusion that there is no "abstraction, shadow, image" that can be termed "Man", but only individuals with more or less dignity, depending on circumstance, and who contain within themselves the glorious workings of the "universal heart", that being the capability of feeling empathy for others which is present to some degree in all men. The mature adult is able to see "men as they are men within themselves" and "how oft high

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service is perform'd within,/ When all the external man is rude in shew" (The Prelude xii, ll. 225-27). Generalizations and externals are replaced by a deeper understanding and appreciation of other individuals.

Secondly, the pleasure and pain principle that was dominant in the education of childhood is refined and synthesized in maturity to become "calmness" and "emotion" working in harmony to bestow all benignant bounties.

> From nature doth emotion come, and moods
> Of calmness equally are nature's gift,
> This is her glory; these two attributes
> Are sister horns that constitute her strength;
> This twofold influence is the sun and shower
> Of all her bounties, both in origin
> And end alike benignant. Hence it is,
> That Genius which exists by interchange
> Of peace and excitation, finds in her
> His best and purest Friend, from her receives
> That energy by which he seeks the truth,
> Is rouzed, aspires, grasps, struggles, wishes, craves,
> From her that happy stillness of the mind
> Which fits him to receive it, when unsought.
>
> (The Prelude xii, ll. 1-14)

If the "two attributes", the "sister horns", constitute Nature's strength, perhaps the greatest gain emotionally for maturity is the aspect of "calmness". For example, in this passage from Book xi of The Prelude, Wordsworth addresses Nature as:

> Ye motions of delight, that through the fields
> Stir gently, breezes and soft airs that breathe
> The breath of Paradise, and find your way
> To the recesses of the soul! Ye Brooks
> Muttering along the stones, a busy voice
> By day, a quiet one in silent night,
> And you, ye Groves, whose ministry it is
> To interpose the covert of your shades,

> Even as a sleep, betwixt the heart of man
> And the uneasy world, 'twixt man himself,
> Not seldom, and his own unquiet heart,
>
> (11. 9-19)

Man discovers in Nature not just a "passion" and a "rapture", but something more profound--Nature's "ministry" that can interpose a healing balm not only between "the heart of man" and the pain of societal living, but that also can soothe the fears and anxieties that plague his "own unquiet heart". One might say that it is through the maturation of the "pleasure and pain" principle that adults become able to bear restrictions and unhappiness. Thus, in the sonnet "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room" (Poetical Works III, pp. 1-2), Wordsworth makes the point that every individual must learn that life imposes certain limitations, whether they be physical, mental, or emotional, but that this situation is not so unbearable as we may think. Similarly, in "Elegiac Stanzas", Wordsworth tells us that at one time he would have viewed Peele Castle as "a treasure-house, a mine/ Of peaceful years; a chronicle of heaven;--" and that it would have represented "Elysian quiet, without toil or strife". In his maturity, with the death of his brother John[5], he tells us that "a deep distress hath humanised my Soul" and he can never again "be what I have been"--that

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[5]For another example of Wordsworth's own fortitude with regard to the death of his brother John, see the "Elegiac Verses" (Poetical Works IV, pp. 263-265).

is, filled with undisturbed content--for "such happiness" he knows now, "'tis surely blind". However, he ends the poem on an optimistic note:

> But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
> And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
> Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.--
> Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.
>
> (ll. 57-60)

(Poetical Works IV, pp. 258-60)

Finally, in The Prelude x, Wordsworth goes so far as to say that

> . . . under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
> Griefs bitterest of ourselves or of our kind,
> If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
> Honour which could not else have been, a faith,
> An elevation, and a sanctity,
> If new strength be not given, or old restored
> The blame is ours not Nature's.
>
> (ll. 424-30)

In addition to the possession of the "calmness" and fortitude that are a result of Nature's teaching, the mature individual has a more objective, less in-turning view of things. As was remarked in childhood, Wordsworth indicates throughout his poetry[6] an abhorrence for self-centredness--that is, the kind of self-absorption that makes one's "self" the centre of the universe and leaves little room for the appreciation and love of Nature. Wordsworth says that to be truly in Nature's bosom, to

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[6]Compare Wordsworth's regret at the self-centredness of adolescence (The Prelude iv, ll. 270-94), with his feeling of freedom from its bondage in maturity (The Prelude i, ll. 15-25).

feel Her Presence, a man must shake off "the burthen" of his "own unnatural self" (The Prelude i, l. 23), and only then will he be able to bring to full fruition the feelings of love he began to experience in adolescence.

The fullest expression of love is only possible in maturity according to Wordsworth, and is the subject of much of his poetry. He says of love:

> . . . here
> Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
> All truth and beauty, from pervading love,
> That gone, we are as dust.
>
> (The Prelude xiii, ll. 149-52)

The aspects of mature love are many. For example, parental love is a major theme in such poems as "Michael", where the tenderness of Michael's love for his son Luke is demonstrated in these lines:

> . . . For often-times
> Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
> Had done him female service, not alone
> For dalliance and delight, as is the use
> Of fathers, but with patient mind enforced
> To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked
> His cradle with a woman's gentle hand.
>
> (ll. 152-58)

When the boy is older, he accompanies his father on his daily tasks in the mountains and

> . . . objects which the Shepherd loved before
> Were dearer now . . . from the Boy there came
> Feelings and emanations--things which were
> Light to the sun and music to the wind;
> . . . the old Man's heart seemed born again . . .
>
> (ll. 199-203)

In The Prelude viii, Wordsworth describes the touching

sight of a London working-man sitting

> . . . with a sickly babe
> Upon his knee, whom he had thither brought
> For sunshine, and to breathe the fresher air.
>
> (ll. 849-51)

Wordsworth says that the man, totally unaware of all who passed by

> . . . held the Child, and, bending over it,
> As if he were afraid both of the sun
> And of the air which he had come to seek,
> He eyed it with unutterable love.
>
> (ll. 856-59)

In addition to parental love[7], Wordsworth devotes some attention to sibling affection[8], notably to his own sister Dorothy whom he refers to in "There is an Eminence" as:

> . . . She who dwells with me, whom I have loved
> With such communion, that no place on earth
> Can ever be a solitude to me,
>
> (ll. 14-16)
>
> (Poetical Works II, p. 115)

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[7]Among the many examples of Wordsworth's poetry dealing with maternal and paternal love, are "The Affliction of Margaret" (Poetical Works II, pp. 47-50), "The Emigrant Mother" (Poetical Works II, pp. 56-59), "Her Eyes are Wild" (Poetical Works II, pp. 107-10), "The Two April Mornings" (Poetical Works IV, pp. 69-71), and "The Fountain" (Poetical Works IV, pp. 71-73).

[8]For further examples of Wordsworth's attention to sibling love, see the poems "When, to the attractions of the busy world" (Poetical Works II, pp. 118-23), and "The Brothers" (Poetical Works II, pp. 1-13).

There is also particular attention paid to the love between friends[9]. In The Prelude vi, Wordsworth says of himself and Coleridge:

> There is no grief, no sorrow, no despair,
> No languor, no dejection, no dismay,
> No absence scarcely can there be for those
> Who love as we do.
>
> (ll. 253-56)

Nor is romantic love ignored by Wordsworth, although generally speaking his romantic poetry does not resemble the highly-embellished "love" story that one finds in his rendition of "Vaudracour and Julia". Wordsworth's typical style of romantic poetry is to be found in such an example as "She was a Phantom of delight", which traces romantic love from the dawning of infatuation to a more mature reflection on the love-object. In the first stanza the loved one is compared rather fancifully to Nature:

> Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair;
> Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
> But all things else about her drawn
> From May-time and the cheerful Dawn;
>
> (ll. 5-8)

As his knowledge of the beloved increases, the man says "I saw her upon nearer view,/ A Spirit, yet a Woman too!"

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[9]See also the poem "Stanzas", where Wordsworth makes further reference to his friendship with Coleridge (Poetical Works II, pp. 25-27), the description of Michael Beaupuy in The Prelude ix, ll. 293-327), the observation of his lifelong friend Robert Jones in "A Character" (Poetical Works IV, pp. 58-59) and the tribute to Thomas Wilkinson found in the poem "To the Spade of a Friend" (Poetical Works IV, pp. 75-76).

She becomes to him

> A Creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food;
> For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
> Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.
>
> (ll. 17-20)

The last stanza is the summation of his mature love[10]:

> And now I see with eye serene
> The very pulse of the machine;
> A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
> A Traveller betwixt life and death;
> The reason firm, the temperate will,
> Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;
> A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
> To warn, to comfort, and command;
> And yet a Spirit still, and bright
> With something of an angel light.
>
> (Poetical Works II, pp. 213-14)

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[10]It is unfortunate that Wordsworth's mature romantic outlook has tended to be overlooked in critical studies, as it is intensely interesting in its variety of moods. There is the fanciful story of "Vaudracour and Julia" (The Prelude ix, ll. 555-934), the highly emotional "Strange fits of passion have I known" (Poetical Works II, p. 29) and the singularly beautiful love poem "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" (Poetical Works II, p. 30). In "Louisa", the woman is not the fragile object so common in love poetry, but is physically strong and closely allied to Nature (see Poetical Works II, p. 28). In the poem "To M.H.", and in The Prelude xi, ll. 199-223, the imagery is of a quiet and calm sweetness emanating from the beloved. Finally, in the poem "O Nightingale! thou surely art", Wordsworth compares two kinds of love and admiration--the one for the creature of a "fiery heart" whose notes "pierce and pierce;/ Tumultuous harmony and fierce!" and who sings a "song in mockery", the other for the Stock-dove, who tells "his homely tale" in a voice that is muted and elusive, his love song quietly and pensively persistent. Wordsworth says:

> He sang of love, with quiet blending,
> Slow to begin, and never ending;
> Of serious faith, and inward glee;
>
> (Poetical Works II, p. 214)

Man is not the only recipient of love in its fully mature state. Wordsworth says, in describing himself, that for the first time "the inferior Creatures, beast or bird" were able to attune his "spirit to that gentleness of love" and to win from him "those minute obeisances/ Of tenderness" which, he says, "I may number now/ With my first blessings." (The Prelude viii, 490-95)[11]

Like romantic love, this aspect of Wordsworth's thought and observation has been given little attention, but in any discussion of maturity it warrants special mention because according to Wordsworth, it is only in maturity that man is particularly concerned with the welfare and the treatment of all living things.

There are many examples of the love of animals[12],

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[11]This can be contrasted with the attitude of the child in Chapter III, as an indication of the heightened sense of concern for all sentient creatures that should develop in maturity.

[12]See Wordsworth's note on "Peter Bell" (p. 527), where he says:

> In the woods of Alfoxden I used to take great delight in noticing the habits, tricks, and physiognomy of asses; and I have no doubt that I was thus put upon writing the poem out of liking for the creature that is so often dreadfully abused.

Also, with regard to "Peter Bell", it is interesting that Wordsworth likens the distress of the small son of the dead man to ". . . a poor bird--her plundered nest/ Hovering around with dolorous moan!" (ll. 649-50) In Wordsworth's description of the character of "Michael", he says that the hills

> . . . like a book, preserved the memory
> Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
> Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts

as for example in "The Idiot Boy", where, in her hour of darkest despair over the disappearance of her retarded boy, Betty Foy's most comforting thought is centred on the pony of whom she says, "the Pony he is mild and good,/ And we have always used him well;" (ll. 303-304). The same theme is found in "The Waggoner", where Wordsworth focuses on Benjamin's patience with his team of horses:

> The Horses have worked with right good-will,
> And so have gained the top of the hill;
> He was patient, they were strong,
> And now they smoothly glide along,
> Recovering breath, and pleased to win
> The praises of mild Benjamin.
>
> (Canto First, ll. 40-45)

Further:

> So grateful in themselves, the certainty
> Of honourable gain:
>
> (ll. 70-74)

Moreover, Michael gently reproves his little son when, during the shearing, the child

> . . . disturbed the sheep
> By catching at their legs, or with his shouts
> Scared them, while they lay still beneath the shears.
>
> (ll. 174-76)

Wordsworth's affection for dogs is apparent in the several poems he writes about their characteristics. The best example is that called "Tribute", where he describes simply and movingly, the death of a favourite dog (Poetical Works IV, pp. 79-80). And finally, Wordsworth's ultimate sentiment with regard to the importance of having respect for all creatures is summed-up succinctly in the last stanza of "Hart-Leap Well", when he says, regarding man and Nature:

> "One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
> Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals;
> Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels."
>
> (ll. 177-80)

His whip they do not dread--his voice
They only hear it to rejoice.
To stand or go is at *their* pleasure;

(Canto First, ll. 103-105)

Benjamin observes with pride:

My jolly team, he finds that ye
Will work for nobody but me!
Full proof of this the Country gained;
It knows how ye were vexed and strained,
And forced unworthy stripes to bear,
When trusted to another's care.
Here was it--on this rugged slope,
Which now ye climb with heart and hope,
I saw you, between rage and fear,
Plunge, and fling back a spiteful ear,
And ever more and more confused,
As ye were more and more abused:
As chance would have it, passing by
I saw you in that jeopardy:
A word from me was like a charm;
Ye pulled together with one mind;

(Canto First, ll. 118-33)

Benjamin's unfortunate attraction to pubs costs him his job, but he has a kind of final triumph, for:

Nor could the waggon long survive,
When Benjamin had ceased to drive:
It lingered on;--guide after guide
Ambitiously the office tried;
But each unmanageable hill
Called for *his* patience and *his* skill;--

(Canto Fourth, ll. 187-92)

The importance of love in Wordsworth's poetry cannot be over-emphasized and is a gift from Nature to man, providing that man is prepared to receive it. As Wordsworth tells us in the poem "To My Sister" (Poetical Works IV, pp. 59-60), love comes not from reason, from any cerebral effort on the part of man, but is a gift "from the

blessed power" that rolls through all things and makes man at one with the world. The same type of general statement is made even more emphatically in "Lines Written in Early Spring" (Poetical Works IV, p. 58), where Wordsworth plays at posing a philosophical question. If flowers, birds, and trees can rejoice in the life of Nature and the love that seems inherent in all things, what possesses man that, through his own perversity, he gradually loses touch with the ultimate "thrill of pleasure" that is readily available in Nature.

This is not to say that there is no sorrow in love; indeed, love of family and friends, romantic attachments, even love for one's own property, can result in grief[13]

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[13]The love of Michael for his son Luke, and of Margaret for her long-lost son are costly emotionally. Friendship can also be painful as in "A Complaint" (Poetical Works II, p. 34), where the loss of friendship's love leaves a "comfortless and hidden well" where deep "waters sleep/ In silence and obscurity". The grief that results for Wordsworth from the loss of his friendship with Coleridge is demonstrated in "The Forsaken" (Poetical Works II, p. 32), and in the poem "'Tis said, that some have died for love:", Wordsworth tells of men to whom love has been "such a grievous pain" that suicide was preferable to the emptiness of life. However, he concludes the poem with his own thoughts on the subject:

> Ah gentle Love! if ever thought was thine
> To store up kindred hours for me, thy face
> Turn from me, gentle Love!
>
> (ll. 48-50)

(Poetical Works II, pp. 33-34)

The psychological effect of the loss of one's property is also a favourite theme with Wordsworth. This is mentioned in "Michael" and in "The Brothers", and is the major element in the poem "Repentance", where two brothers are tempted by thoughts of profit into relinquishing their land (see Poetical Works II, pp. 46-47). Also, in "The

that is almost unbearable. Nevertheless, as Wordsworth says of Michael:

> There is a power in the strength of love;
> 'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
> Would overset the brain, or break the heart:
>
> (ll. 448-50)

Yet another great gain that Wordsworth sees in maturity is the ability to indulge in recollection; to revitalize one's thoughts, attitudes and emotions by recalling past experiences, particularly those that took place in a natural setting. Wordsworth contends that the mind of the mature man requires the stimulus of "invigorating thoughts from former years", those

> . . . recollected hours that have the charm
> Of visionary things, and lovely forms
> And sweet sensations that throw back our life
> And almost make our Infancy itself
> A visible scene, on which the sun is shining . . .
>
> (The Prelude i, ll. 659-63)

Maturity brings the invaluable pleasure of conjuring-up what we have loved in Nature; from all those early years of childhood and youth, is an inheritance of remembrances that can be beneficial in times of stress or loneliness if we are wise enough to draw upon such resources. In the "Tintern Abbey Lines", Wordsworth makes this statement about the value of recollection in his own life:

Last of the Flock", Wordsworth tells of the man who is forced by circumstances to sell the flock of sheep he worked so hard to gain. With the loss of each sheep, the man suffers a corresponding loss of pride in his very existence (see Poetical Works II, pp. 43-46).

> These beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing even into my purer mind,
> With tranquil restoration:--feelings too
> Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
> As may have had no trivial influence
> On that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
> Of kindness and of love.
>
> (ll. 22-35)

Wordsworth says that many times "in darkness and amid the many shapes/ Of joyless daylight" when he has been unbearably pressured by the demands of the world, his spirit, although "with many recognitions dim and faint" with the passage of the years is able to draw upon the Nature that inspired his youth for a renewal of courage and inspiration for "life and food/ For future years."

In the poem "To the Cuckoo" (Poetical Works II, pp. 207-208), Wordsworth says, "thou tellest, Cuckoo! in the vale/ Of visionary hours" and remembers how, in his boyhood, its cry made him "look a thousand ways/ In bush, and tree, and sky." Now, in maturity, he says:

> And I can listen to thee yet;
> Can lie upon the plain
> And listen, till I do beget
> That golden time again.
>
> (ll. 25-28)

Many of the short poems deal with the powers of recollection as a mainstay of serenity and happiness in

adulthood[14], and similarly, Wordsworth's famous "spots of time"[15] serve the same purpose. He says that "there are in our existence spots of time" by which "our minds/ Are nourished and invisibly repair'd" and that each man's particular "spots in time" are to be found

> Among those passages of life in which
> We have had deepest feeling that the mind
> Is lord and master, and that outward sense
> Is but the obedient servant of her will.

Moreover:

> Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,
> Are scatter'd everywhere, taking their date
> From our first childhood: in our childhood even
> Perhaps are most conspicuous.
>
> (See The Prelude xi, ll. 258-77)

One final example of the power of recollection, is found in the sonnet "There is a little unpretending Rill". Wordsworth describes this humble stream of limpid water as it "quivers down the hill,/ Furrowing its shallow way with dubious will". Yet, he says, it holds far more meaning for him than more pretentious bodies of water because it conjures up thoughts "of private recollection sweet and still". Time may pass with all its forgettable pleasures

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[14]See, for example, "To a Butterfly" (Poetical Works I, p. 226),"The Sparrow's Nest" (Poetical Works I, p. 227),"To the Daisy" (Poetical Works II, pp. 135-38), and "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (Poetical Works II, pp. 216-17). In all these poems, the smallest things have the power to evoke real joy and meaning in life.

[15]See Wordsworth's own "spots of time" as described in The Prelude xi, ll. 277-389.

but for Wordsworth, "the immortal Spirit of one happy day/ Lingers beside that Rill, in vision clear." (Poetical Works III, pp. 4-5)

iv. The Holistic Quality of Loss and Gain in Maturity

Naturally, the aspects of "loss" and "gain" that accompany maturity cannot be neatly separated or isolated as they are essentially indivisible. To understand the relationship between these twin agents of human experience and development, it is necessary to look at them holistically, as for example in three of Wordsworth's longer poems.

In "The Kitten and Falling Leaves", Wordsworth notes the joy of the infant and the animation of the kitten in comparison with his own loss of spontaneity:

> . . . the sight so stirs and charms
> Thee, Baby, laughing in my arms,
> That almost I could repine
> That your transports are not mine,
> That I do not wholly fare
> Even as ye do, thoughtless pair!
>
> (11. 105-10)

Yet, he continues determinedly:

> . . . I will have my careless season
> Spite of melancholy reason,
> Will walk through life in such a way
> That, when time brings on decay,
> Now and then I may possess
> Hours of perfect gladsomeness.
>
> (11. 111-16)

Wordsworth assures us that he will be

> --Pleased by any random toy:
> By a kitten's busy joy,

Or an infant's laughing eye
Sharing in the ecstasy;
I would fare like that or this,
Find my wisdom in my bliss;
Keep the sprightly soul awake,
And have faculties to take,
Even from things by sorrow wrought,
Matter for a jocund thought,
Spite of care, and spite of grief,
To gambol with Life's falling Leaf.

(ll. 117-28)

While for the young child the "sprightly soul" comes effortlessly, for the adult it must be carefully nurtured if it is to exist at all.

In the "Immortality Ode", the problem of loss and gain is treated at some length. Wordsworth says that in his maturity, "the things which I have seen I now can see no more" and that "there hath past away a glory from the earth". He reproaches himself that the gaiety of the spring that seems to fill the heart of every creature and every object of the earth is not his and that he must struggle with the sense of his own loss of delight. Wordsworth traces the developmental stages of human life from the infant trailing his "clouds of glory" to the "shades of the prison-house" that are beginning to "close/ Upon the growing Boy" (but who, nevertheless, experiences much spontaneous joy in Nature), to the youth, who is gradually losing his total communion with Nature but who "still is Nature's Priest". Of the adult's vision of glory, Wordsworth says, "at length the Man perceives it die away,/ And fade into the light of common day".

Yet for all the developmental gloom of these pronouncements, Wordsworth points out that the gain that does exist in maturity is not slight. He says that in adulthood, despite the disappearance of "the radiance which was once so bright", there is strength to be found "in the soothing thoughts that spring/ Out of human suffering"--in other words, the serenity and fortitude that can come only with the experience of mature sorrow and "in the faith that looks through death" as well as the wisdom that comes "in years that bring the philosophic mind".

If Wordsworth seems to be striving, perhaps even labouring, for comfort in the above expressions, he breaks into the full stride of his mature philosophic belief in the final stanza:

> And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
> Think not of any severing of our loves!
> Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
> I only have relinquished one delight
> To live beneath your more habitual sway.
> I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
> Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
> The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
> Is lovely yet;
> The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
> Do take a sober colouring from an eye
> That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
> Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
> Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
> Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.
>
> (11. 188-204)

Thus, if spontaneity is forever lost, together with the careless intimacy with Nature that is known only

to childhood, still, Wordsworth says, in his "heart of hearts" he lives beneath the "more habitual sway" of Nature's influence. Indeed, in maturity, Nature is seen as having a deeper meaning than before, a meaning that is bound-up with "man's mortality". The human qualities of "tenderness, its joys, and fears" in conjunction with even "the meanest flower that blows" provides a profound spiritual experience.

Perhaps the clearest and strongest statement of the complexity of the inter-relationship of loss and gain is found in Wordsworth's description of the change in his own relationship to Nature in the "Tintern Abbey Lines". Comparing youth with maturity, he says:

> . . . That time is past,
> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
> Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
> Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
> Abundant recompense. For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue.
>
> (11. 83-93)

But the greatest "recompense" of all is his discovery of the "oneness" of the creation:

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

(ll. 93-102)

And so we reach the final working-out of Nature's great plan for mankind, the plan that leaves Wordsworth in his maturity

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

(ll. 103-11)

v. Old Age

It is apparent that in Wordsworth's view, human beings in their old age return full circle, to be embraced in the bosom of Nature. Moreover, the qualities that were uppermost in Wordsworth's view of the infant--innocence and passivity--are the dominant characteristics of the aged. However, while the passivity of the infant is that of sensation, the passivity of the elderly is a kind of fortitude in the face of life's whims, as for example in Wordsworth's description of the old soldier in The Prelude iv. When the soldier replies to Wordsworth's questions, he emanates a calm and stoical acceptance of his fate:

. . . neither slow nor eager; but unmov'd,
And with a quiet, uncomplaining voice,
A stately air of mild indifference,

He told, in simple words, a Soldier's Tale,

(11. 442-45)

Wordsworth observes that:

> . . . in all he said
> There was a strange half-absence, and a tone
> Of weakness and indifference, as of one
> Remembering the importance of his theme
> But feeling it no longer.
>
> (11. 474-78)

There is a "ghastly mildness" in his look and a passivity as he tells Wordsworth that "'my trust is in the God of Heaven/ And in the eye of him that passes me.'"

In "Resolution and Independence", the old Leech-gatherer is almost an inanimate part of Nature. Wordsworth describes him:

> As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
> Wonder to all who do the same espy,
> By what means it could thither come, and whence;
> So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
> Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
> Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself;
>
> (11. 57-63)

Further:

> Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
> Nor all asleep--in his extreme old age:
> His body was bent double, feet and head
> Coming together in their pilgrimage;
>
> (11. 64-67)

Like the old soldier, the Leech-gatherer supports himself, "his body, limbs, and face,/ Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood:" As Wordsworth approaches, "motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,/ That heareth not the loud winds

when they call;/ And moveth all together, if it move at all." (ll. 75-77) Wordsworth says:

> At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
> Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
> Upon the muddy water, which he conned,
> As if he had been reading in a book:
>
> (ll. 78-81)

Wordsworth queries the old Leech-gatherer much as he queries the child in "We are Seven", looking for a logical and comfortable response, but the old man repeats that he travels the country looking for leeches and Wordsworth finds that "while he was talking thus, the lonely place,/ The old Man's shape, and speech--all troubled me:" (ll. 127-28) What Wordsworth discovers is that for the very elderly, as for the child, human problems are accepted with a kind of stoic simplicity not burdened by speculation or resistance.

The same innocence and passivity are found in "Michael" where the old man is first described as having been:

> . . . stout of heart, and strong of limb.
> His bodily frame had been from youth to age
> Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
> Intense and frugal, apt for all affairs,
> And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
> And watchful more than ordinary men.
>
> (ll. 42-47)

Near the end of the poem, when sorrow has overcome Michael's heart, he becomes almost at one with the earth. He returns again and again to the valley where the Sheep-

fold had been started and gives himself over to an almost complete passivity:

> There, by the Sheep-fold, sometimes was he seen
> Sitting alone, with that his faithful Dog,
> Then old, beside him, lying at his feet.
> The length of full seven years, from time to time,
> He at the building of this Sheep-fold wrought,
> And left the work unfinished when he died.
>
> (ll. 467-72)

In "The Old Cumberland Beggar", Wordsworth tells of the aged beggar sitting by the side of the road:

> The aged Man
> Had placed his staff across the broad smooth stone
> That overlays the pile; and, from a bag
> All white with flour, the dole of village dames,
> He drew his scraps and fragments, one by one;
> And scanned them with a fixed and serious look
> Of idle computation.
>
> (ll. 6-12)

And further:

> He travels on, a solitary Man;
> His age has no companion. On the ground
> His eyes are turned, and, as he moves along,
> *They* move along the ground; and, evermore,
> Instead of common and habitual sight
> Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,
> And the blue sky, one little span of earth
> Is all his prospect.
>
> (ll. 44-51)

But, poor, and slow, and weary, yet the old man is no burden, insists Wordsworth:

> 'Tis Nature's law
> That none, the meanest of created things,
> Of forms created the most vile and brute,
> The dullest or most noxious, should exist
> Divorced from good--a spirit and pulse of good,
> A life and soul, to every mode of being

Inseparably linked.

(ll. 73-79)

The old man, as the infant, serves a kind of purpose for the rest of humanity as in his innocence and helplessness he draws forth the best in human compassion and selflessness:

> While from door to door,
> This old Man creeps, the villagers in him
> Behold a record which together binds
> Past deeds and offices of charity
> Else unremembered, and so keeps alive
> The kindly mood in hearts which lapse of years,
> And that half-wisdom half-experience gives,
> Make slow to feel, and by sure steps resign
> To selfishness and cold oblivious cares.

(ll. 87-95)

The old man's office is to bring to people "tender offices and pensive thoughts" and Wordsworth asks that such a person be allowed to roam free:

> . . . long as he can wander, let him breathe
> The freshness of the valleys; let his blood
> Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
> And let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath
> Beat his grey locks against his withered face.

(ll. 172-76)

And finally:

> Be his the natural silence of old age!
> Let him be free of mountain solitudes;
> And have around him, whether heard or not,
> The pleasant melody of woodland birds.
> Few are his pleasures: if his eyes, which now
> Have been so long familiar with the earth,
> No more behold without some effort
> The countenance of the horizontal sun,
> Rising or setting, let the light at least
> Find a free entrance to their languid orbs,
> And let him, *where* and *when* he will, sit down
> Beneath the trees, or by the grassy bank

Of highway side, and with the little birds
Share his chance-gathered meal; and, finally,
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die!

(ll. 182-97)

(Poetical Works IV, pp. 234-40)

The mind of the aged person is not dull or empty, but teems with a life of its own that is hardly comprehended by the young. Wordsworth points this out in the sonnet "Though narrow be that old Man's cares", where he tells us:

Though narrow be that old Man's cares, and near,
The poor old Man is greater than he seems:
For he hath waking empire, wide as dreams;
An ample sovereignty of eye and ear.
Rich are his walks with supernatural cheer;
The region of his inner spirit teems
With vital sounds and monitory gleams
Of high astonishment and pleasing fear.

(ll. 1-8)

(Poetical Works III, p. 34)

The summation of Wordsworth's thoughts on old age is found in the poem "Animal Tranquillity and Decay", where he says:

The little hedgerow birds,
That peck along the road, regard him not.
He travels on, and in his face, his step,
His gait, is one expression: every limb,
His look and bending figure, all bespeak
A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought.--He is insensibly subdued
To settled quiet: he is one by whom
All effort seems forgotten; one to whom
Long patience hath such mild composure given,
That patience now doth seem a thing of which
He hath no need. He is by nature led
To peace so perfect that the young behold

With envy, what the Old Man hardly feels.

(ll. 1-14)

(Poetical Works IV, p. 247)

vi. Summary

In summation, Wordsworth's early twenties leave him with the conclusion that for him the world of rational philosophy does not provide any important answers. His commitment is to Nature, both in Her physical and transcendental aspects, in conjunction with human imagination.

However, his realization of his place in the Universe is a mixed blessing, for he feels keenly the loss of childhood's thoughtless and careless spontaneity, the joy that springs unaided. Wordsworth regrets the mundane concerns that can stifle imagination unless the adult is consciously vigilant about retaining some measure of delight in the world about him. The ability to lose oneself becomes increasingly rare and precious, almost a momentary haven in the press of daily cares and anxieties. Moreover, the adult is all too easily led into the paths of stultifying analysis; he must be ever on guard to balance the weight of custom with "a heart/ That watches and receives."

If there is loss, there is also gain in maturity. Wordsworth believes that for himself, at least, adulthood has brought a "more judicious knowledge of what makes/ The dignity of individual Man". Man is not an abstraction,

but an individual; not to be categorized, but viewed in his endless complexity. Wordsworth still believes in the "universal heart" and he is optimistic about what is basic in man, but he is no longer willing to typecast with abandon. Another gain is increasing calmness, or serenity in the face of life. The adult, if he is wise, can find in Nature a balm that quietens the threats to happiness from without and from within each individual. Another gain is the increased ability to experience love for all things, a compassion that transcends "self" and which hardly exists in childhood and but very fancifully in youth. The other major gain in maturity is that of recollection, the ability of the adult to draw from his past and present experiences in order to give meaning and satisfaction to his daily existence. It is this quality that can give to maturity its "hours of perfect gladsomeness" and a "strength in what remains behind".

Finally, in old age, we see a return to the passive and rather innocent acceptance of life's realities that we find in the baby. There is, in infancy and in old age, an apprehension that is completely mysterious; and, as is obvious from Wordsworth's tributes, to him a mystery that is as beautiful as it is profound.

Nature, quite simply, takes to Herself the life that She first supported with a quiet and calm inevitability.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this study to present an interpretation of William Wordsworth's concept of the role of Nature as educator in the life of man, as revealed through his poetry of 1797 to 1807.

For Wordsworth, Nature exists in a very real physical sense and to indulge in sensual contact with Her is of vital significance in human development. Moreover, Nature is a "teacher". She has the transcendental ability to care consciously for Her inhabitants and to provide guidance for humans who are wise enough to "listen" to Her voice. What is undeniably cruel or indifferent in Nature cannot be explained away, but often must be accepted as part of the unfortunate occurrences that are an integral part of life.

As far as "human nature" is concerned, Wordsworth visualizes man as a member of the total creation. However, man is also a participant in the human species, and it is in the feeling of unity with his species that he is able to comprehend the feelings and needs of others. Within the species, man is also an individual, and individuality is at least as important to Wordsworth as unity. As an

individual, man can rise to great heights of nobility in the face of suffering and it is in this uniqueness that man can most readily find his purpose for existence. When a man is wicked or indifferent, Wordsworth tends to take the view that it is a perversity caused by unfortunate circumstances, or the result of an undeveloped imaginative faculty which does not allow such a man to enjoy the ultimate communion with Nature that is essential for "completeness" in maturity.

In order to achieve this "completeness", Wordsworth stipulates that there must be a natural development of the individual, that being the interaction of the human personality or imagination at all stages with Nature.

This process starts at birth, and the infant's qualities of innocence and passivity of sensation make him an ideal receptacle for the subtle ministrations of Nature. She lulls him into an inner "awareness" of Her Presence that is a preparation for each succeeding stage of growth.

The young child from ages five to ten is, in Wordsworth's view, spontaneous, joyful, adventuresome, and amoral. He is content merely to be alive and is satisfied to be allowed to roam in Nature in freedom from adult supervision. Nature provides the environment for the discoveries the child makes and the challenges he faces, but most importantly, She trains him by balancing his pleasure with pain. In other words, at this stage, the child is

led through a variety of experiences to the conscious awareness that there are elements in his world that are mysterious and a little frightening. Through his life in Nature, the child is gradually introduced to the development of conscience or the sense of responsibility for his own actions.

Books also have their place in the development of the child at this stage, but not the kind of texts usually found on classroom shelves[1]. Wordsworth believes that the proper reading material for the child consists of those books of imagination and adventure that transport the child out of his routine and circumscribed existence. Wordsworth is unalterably opposed to precocity in the child, and objects to the kind of over-training that stifles spontaneity and encourages an unnatural and self-conscious display of pedantic attainments.

In youth, or adolescence, the delight in sensation or sensual experience is still strong, but is now joined by an increasing tendency to reflectiveness. There is no doubt that the youth over-dramatizes events, but what is perhaps of more importance to Wordsworth, is that the adolescent is capable of infinitely greater perception both with regard to Nature and to other people. It is in the period of late youth that intellectual pursuits become valuable attributes in helping the young person to apprec-

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[1]This refers to the texts of Wordsworth's own experience.

iate the role of great minds in increasing man's apprehension of the world.

In maturity, the point at which early training has culminated, man is ready to be further enriched by experience in Nature. Early manhood is the time when the beliefs and ideals of youth are challenged and tested by a variety of events and resolve into a final philosophical attitude toward the meaning of life. In this entrance to maturity there are aspects both of loss and of gain.

There is a loss of that joyful spontaneity, that careless rapture of childhood; it is no longer possible for the truly mature adult to indulge in the happiness that is free from sorrow. Moreover, the adult has an unfortunate predilection for analytical dissection of every idea and emotion. This endless mulling-over "reason" and "explanation" brings knowledge, but also dissatisfaction and disappointment; what is even worse is that the "knowledge" gained is usually nothing more than reductionism of the "holistic" truth of life.

But if maturity implies loss, it also contains the possibility of a number of gains. The first of these is a noticeable lessening of self-preoccupation and a greater inclination to view other men in terms of their inner qualities as distinct from their superficial accomplishments. There is also a greater interest in man as an individual rather than as defined under "mankind".

Secondly, there is the development of fortitude, or the increased inner strength to bear the burdens of life without losing hope or faith.

Of even more significance, is the inclination and aptitude for "love". In childhood, life is centred largely on the "self" with all other persons and things on the periphery; in youth, love is a less self-preoccupied, but rather dramatic overflow of good spirits. In maturity, love becomes a deepened and intensified emotion, absorbed in the object of the affection. Love includes all things--family, friends, animals, and even one's property. Love is a focal point of adult life and it is through love that life achieves its meaning.

Equally important with the stress on the growth of the ability to love, is Wordsworth's view that in maturity we have the invaluable, sustaining power of recollection; that is, the power to meditate with tranquillity on those past events that restore us to a sense of peace and harmony within ourselves. He tells us that in moments of almost unbearable despair, our power to recollect those things that have once made us happy or that have made a potent impact on our faculties have an incredible healing agency.

Finally then, mature life is a closely interwoven fabric of loss and gain, but if it has been properly trained in the heart of Nature, maturity can offer the

richest reward of any age, and at its conclusion, in old age, the human being returns once more to the bosom of Nature where he exists in a state of innocence and passivity that is remarkable in its resemblance to the period of infancy.

Having traced the stages of development of the human being in interaction with Nature, it is important to look at precisely what Nature has to offer as the educator of man; what makes Nature the best and most suitable monitor of the actions of human beings, according to Wordsworth.

It is readily apparent from reading Wordsworth's poetry that he believes in the significance of Nature's entry into the life of any person at the moment of birth and the importance of a continuing close, personal relationship with natural objects in the life of the child. It is not a question of substituting Nature for human care and companionship; Wordsworth makes it quite clear that Nature serves as a second mother to the child. While the human mother or nurse provides necessary physical care, love, and instruction, Nature plays Her own specialized role in the development of the infant. Through such sensual means as the rustling of the wind in the trees and the bubbling of a brook or the flow of a river, Nature acts on the subconscious "awareness" of the infant. For each infant the message is different, the meaning is highly

personalized, and for some it will be more obvious in its importance and intensity. The fact remains, that for Wordsworth, the infant who is not raised within reach of this secondary source of learning, this subtle ministration to his inner growth, is cheated of something that is irreplaceable.

The same is true of the growing child. The child who is lucky enough to pass his pre-adolescent years in a country setting has the advantage over his city brother in that he is, whether he knows it or not, continually imbibing the great lesson of his "oneness" with the whole of creation. What effect the Presence of Nature will have on the child is dependent on many other factors, such as the type of home he is raised in and his own nature; but despite these considerations, the child who has the opportunity to develop in the lap of Nature is more fortunate and more likely to become the well-integrated and harmonious adult that Wordsworth holds up as the ideal. Wordsworth's intense, passionate, and sincere conviction in this regard is borne out by his own experiences. He believes that the happiest and most contented men are to be found among those who have known Nature intimately as children and have found in Her a source of succour throughout life. Therefore, the ideal education for children belongs more properly in Nature's objective domains than in a school classroom. First-hand experience through <u>doing</u>, in a set-

ting that poses problems along with pleasures is always, for him, the superior training-ground for life.

It is also important to point out that for Wordsworth, Nature is never intended to serve as a vehicle by which a person can escape from life's difficulties. Wordsworth's Nature is a rigorous teacher in many respects and the way to a harmonious existence is not easily or painlessly discovered. It is available only to those who seek it with faith, diligence, and fortitude. Therefore, terror, pain, and misery are part of acquiring the most worthy self. There is no indication in Wordsworth's thought that perfect happiness or peace or joy are to be found in the avoidance of pain either in the life of the child or the adult. Thus, beyond the obvious fact that he is linking physical Nature to a formation of conscience that can occur under less hazardous circumstances, Wordsworth means to suggest that the extremities of physical danger can be a desirable means by which these lessons are brought home. The risking of life and limb is not too high a price for the child to pay in order to learn the moral laws that Wordsworth feels are inherent in the great natural scheme.

For the youth, Nature appears to have less importance, because at this stage the person is preoccupied with his own growth and in learning about other people. Nature hovers in the background of his mind as an educ-

ational force, but when She is thought about, it is with a deepened perception of Her value. If Nature has served Her purpose, the youth will be conscious of the part She plays in his life and will feel his kinship with Her in the degree to which it exists.

When all has been said about childhood and the enormous importance of Nature in guiding and forming the attitudes and personality of the child, it is my conclusion that the truly outstanding significance of Nature as educator is to be found in maturity. This is not to downgrade the value of the childhood experience, it is only to say that Nature's supreme influence is felt in the life of the adult, when the human being is able, for the first time, to apprehend the meaning of Nature intellectually. It may appear that this conclusion is somewhat antithetical to Wordsworth's position, but that this is not so, is borne out by several facts.

First, it is not true to say that for Wordsworth, childhood is the apotheosis in human life. Childhood has its wonderful qualities, but is self-centred and has not as yet developed the capacity for love. There is no indication in Wordsworth's thought that he looks with an excessive nostalgia on the period of childhood. He loves its joy and spontaneity and perhaps envies its carelessness, but to say that he has an inordinate desire to return to the state of childish understanding would be

grossly unfair. Wordsworth does reverence childhood, but he does not suggest that one should wish to live in childhood's mental and emotional climate forever.

Therefore, it is the view of this study that Wordsworth is a forward-looking poet. Development is his theme, and development is a process which continues throughout life until the period of very old age. It is true that in The Prelude, the "Immortality Ode", and the "Tintern Abbey Lines", one can find material on which to base the conclusion that Wordsworth has reached a kind of depressed finality about life. However, when one considers the upheavals of his own life previous to this period of his middle thirties, it is not difficult to understand his tendency to despondency; what is more significant is that he never ends on a note of depression. His last statements on any subject are inevitably optimistic in tone. Life in its entirety, with all its caprices and torments, is fascinating from beginning to end. If this were not so, Wordsworth would never have shown such interest in the physical and psychological aspects of the aged.

The most telling-point in backing-up the contention that Nature's supreme achievement lies in Her relationship to maturity is that Wordsworth wished always to be regarded as a "teacher". Considering that most of his readers would be adult, it seems logical that he would desire that the message of his poetry should make an im-

pact on his mature audience, not merely in order that they bring-up their children differently, but that they find a psychological nourishment in his philosophy. In order to find this psychic aid or enrichment one has to be mature, and one must be able to go, with deliberate intent, into Nature and seek answers.

The child may find spontaneous rapture, but only the adult can stop, look, listen, reflect, and be revitalized by his experience. John Stuart Mill is, of course, the archetypal example of this approach to Wordsworth, the man who is able, by reading Wordsworth's poetry, to re-learn or perhaps un-learn some of the responses that have previously dominated his life.

Wordsworth himself demonstrates this last proposition most tellingly in the "Elegiac Verses" written in memory of his brother John. Wordsworth tells of retracing the walks they had taken after their last parting in Grasmere and says:

> Full soon in sorrow did I weep,
> Taught that the mutual hope was dust,
> In sorrow, but for higher trust,
> How miserably deep!
> All vanished in a single word,
> A breath, a sound, and scarcely heard.
>
> (ll. 31-36)

Yet, as he climbs in the mountains, he comes upon the Moss Campion plant, and he finds in it the comfort that is ever present in the education that comes from Nature:

> From many a humble source, to pains

> Like these, there comes a mild release;
> Even here I feel it, even this Plant
> Is in its beauty ministrant
> To comfort and to peace.
>
> (ll. 46-50)

Thus, in the darkest moments of life when we are oppressed by sorrow, fear, humiliation or anxiety, we can turn to Nature and consciously allow ourselves to become lost in something larger than ourselves. The enveloping peace can come from as small a thing as a chance-meeting with Moss Campion, or as large a ministrant as trekking through mountains. What matters is that in maturity, Nature educates man at the highest level to appreciate, to be comforted, to be revitalized physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually by losing himself in the great "whole".

Finally, there are four significant points identified in the introduction to this thesis which I think bear repeating as a conclusion to Wordsworth's view of Nature as the educator of man.

First, it is essential in an age of the dominance of the scientific, rationalistic approach to human growth and education, to re-emphasize the value of intuition in the educative process. This can happen only with a rejuvenation of appreciation for the humanities.

Secondly, we have an unfortunate tendency today, to think almost entirely in terms of present and future, yet any careful study will show that it is only through an understanding of the past, that present and future have

any meaning. In the case of education men like Wordsworth, who are regarded by some people as being far removed from the present scene, provide a cogent example of the fact that there is little in educational theory that is new, but that there is much that has been neglected.

Furthermore, Wordsworth offers us a theory of education that is peculiarly appropriate to the present in, that it proposes that man should live in harmony, rather than in competition, with Nature.

Lastly, Wordsworth's present unpopularity is the key to his value. Because he is somewhere between the rational and the romantic type of thinker, his educational attitude is one of balance. He does not promote sentiment at the expense of clarity; nor does he promote "fact-finding" at the expense of losing sight of the holistic character of the universe.

Wordsworth's belief is that education is lifelong; that it is a search for meaning that does not depend upon the simplicities of rigid, dogmatic formulas. It asks for a concentration upon deepening contact with one's fellow man, and for an individual's concerted effort to become completely receptive to the lesson inherent in Nature.

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